



**citizens
advice**

Wealden

Annual Report 2015/2016

Chair's Introduction

I want to pay tribute to the efforts of all the team for the magnificent outcomes described in this report: volunteers, staff and my fellow trustees.

Special thanks must go to my predecessor as Chair, Bob Johnson, who stepped into the breach to take the reins at a time of significant change for the service.

Our quality of advice audit took place at the end of the financial year and to hear the words *excellent*, *outstanding* and *exemplary* used to describe the work we do gave me a real sense of pride in our service.

These achievements are particularly impressive given our Big Lottery funding ended in August 2015 with **all targets achieved**.

I am pleased to say that thanks to the infrastructure and partnerships we were able to put in place with the Lottery's support, we have been able to continue the expanded 5 day a week service we started under the project, a good demonstration of the value of the Advice Services Transition Fund to rural services like ours.

We know that the funding landscape ahead is challenging and that is why we are particularly grateful for the continued support (financial and practical) of Wealden District Council and the Town and Parish Councils of the District without whom we simply could not function.

We also recognise that to continue to develop our service means:

- working in partnership with local statutory and voluntary services
- listening to our volunteers about how best to deliver change in a way that is rewarding for them and works for our clients.

These priorities are reflected in our plans for the way ahead – there is much to do!



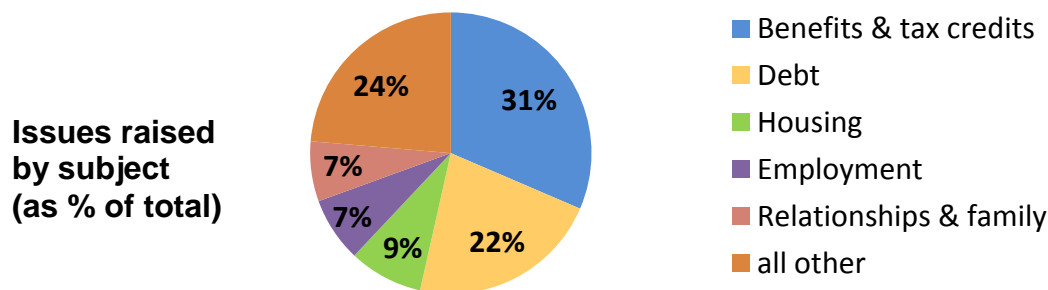
Frank Winslett

Chief Executive's Report

Well what a year it's been! Wealden Citizens Advice helped **4,586 people** with **19,884 issues** in 2015/16, an **11% increase** over the previous year.

98% of clients who sought our help were satisfied or very satisfied with the help they received from us last year - that is a testament to the efforts of the whole team.

As ever, our advisers have risen to the challenge of changes to both policies and procedures, most notably the implementation of Universal Credit in Wealden, and to new ways of working, especially getting our telephone service ADVICELINE off the ground. The latter has helped Citizens Advice across East Sussex help **30%** more people over the telephone than they did in 2014/15.



But it's not just how many people we help, but the quality of the service that we offer that is important. To that end we joined the pilot of a new ongoing quality assurance process developed by Citizens Advice. This represented a significant additional burden for our quality lead, Uckfield supervisor Martha Mayes, but we are now seeing the benefits in terms of identifying training needs and opportunities and developing greater confidence in the consistency of our service across the District.

It is difficult to overstate the positive impact the work of our service can have on some client's lives.....

Improved financial outcomes achieved for clients
£5m

Additional income secured for clients £4m

We helped over 200 people who were at risk of losing their home.

Sometimes the impact of what we do may be less easy to see and this is especially true of our Big Lottery funded **First Aid for Debt East Sussex (FADES)** project which helps those in financial difficulty who also have mental health issues. With six months of the project still to run, our money advisers Karen Grant and Sarah Anstey, ably supported by Clare Emsden, have helped the project support 850 clients with over £7.5m of debt.

This project will be subject to comprehensive evaluation by Canterbury Christ Church University but early findings show how helping clients resolve their financial problems:

- **improves their mental health and well-being**
- reduces the number of times they see their doctor, with the project so far generating an **estimated £194k direct savings for general practice** at a time when budgets are under pressure.

By helping clients resolve their issues we generate savings for the public purse; we estimate that every £1 invested locally produces:

- **£2.46** in savings to local & central government, e.g. reduced health service demand, local authority homelessness services and out-of-work benefits, plus
- **£13.16** in wider economic and social benefits. These include improvements in participation and productivity for clients and volunteers - in Wealden it would cost an extra £600k per year to provide the same service with paid staff
- **£18.72** in benefits to individuals. These include income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems resolved, much of this income will be spent locally.

That's over £34.34 return for every £1 of funding received. A total of nearly £13.5m in benefits, with nearly £1m of this direct savings to the public purse.

These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of all the staff and volunteers of the service to whom I am incredibly grateful, not just for what they do - but for how they do it.

Together with our volunteers we have been thinking of how we can best develop our service to meet the needs of the diverse communities in Wealden in the years ahead. We have identified three key priorities:

- Develop our public information/education capacity so that those who can, are able to access our service themselves
- Improve our remote access customer journey so that those who need advice, whether this be by phone, email, skype or webchat, have the best experience possible
- Expand our face to face offering so that we increase our reach to those most in need in the community, especially where social deprivation is high.

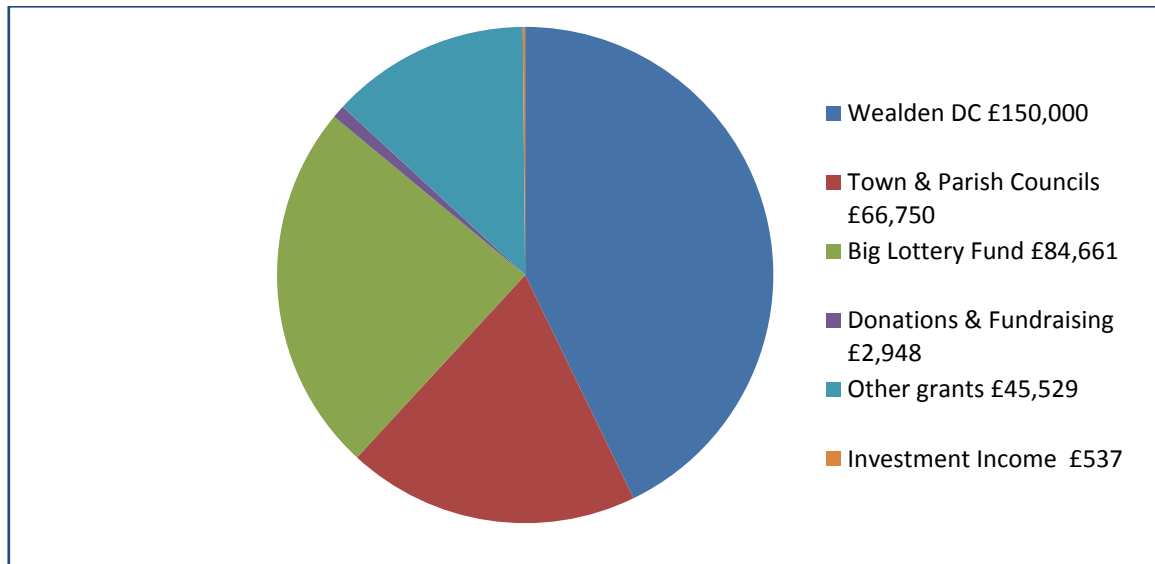
Fulfilling this vision will take hard work, effective partnerships and some significant fund raising efforts, but I know we have the team to deliver.

Kay Birch

Financial Report

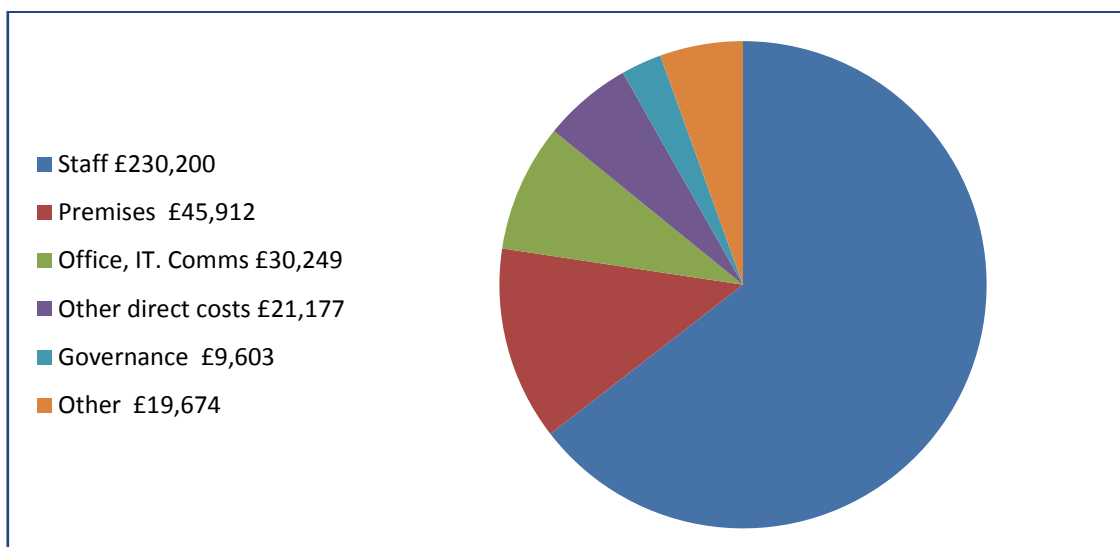
Income

- Income for the year to 31st March 2016 was £350,425 compared to £391,406 for the previous year.



Expenditure

- Expenditure for the year was £356,815 compared to £386,360 for the previous year.
- Reserves decreased by £6,390 to £105,102. Our reserves policy requires the retention of at least 3 months running costs in the event of the liquidation of the service.



Our People

We could not achieve what we do without the commitment of our staff and our 112 strong volunteer team, who give up at least a day a week to serve their communities in the following roles:

- 11 Trustees
- 9 Finance, payroll, IT, research & campaigns
- 74 Gateway assessors & advisers (including trainees)
- 18 Reception & administration (including trainees)

Our volunteers provide unpaid services worth nearly **£600,000**

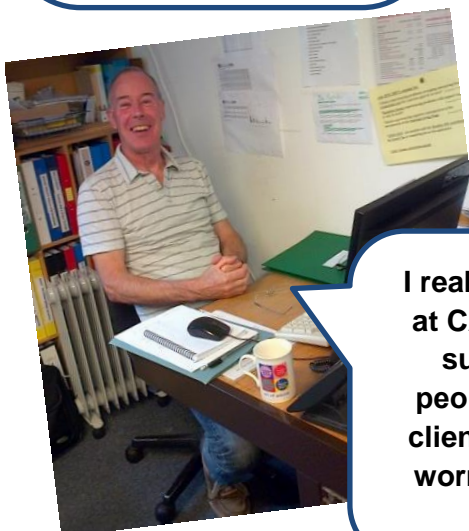
In addition we have 17 paid staff.

Each of these jobs is vital to our service, whether they are: providing a welcoming face to our clients; providing information and advice; or ensuring that our systems work effectively and that we are using our resources wisely.

I became a volunteer to give something back to the community, to keep me in touch with what's going on and to help people with the problems they are trying to sort out. The relief on a client's face can be overwhelming, as if a huge worry has been lifted from their shoulders.



I like working in a team, you feel well supported... You learn how the system works and you can use this info. to support people who are sometimes really up against it.



I really enjoy volunteering at CAB and being part of such a great team of people. It's lovely to see clients leave looking less worried and with a smile on their faces.



In 2015/16:

- 19 new volunteers joined the team
- 18 volunteers have completed gateway assessor training
- 8 members of the team have gone on to complete full adviser training.

Giving our Volunteers a Voice in what we do

No one knows the service better than those who provide it, so we have put some effort this year into getting more input from our volunteers about how we could do things better, both in terms of delivering a service and giving them the best volunteer experience possible.

We run a volunteer survey, produce quarterly newsletters and our volunteer representatives, **Carola Coles, Helen Gallagher and Mike Tollitt**, make sure we get feedback on volunteers' ideas and concerns.

In response to their feedback we are:

- With the support of our supervisors, ensuring we **operate our advice model as flexibly** as we can to meet the needs of our clients given our available resources
- Offering more **workshop based training** based on local case studies so people can develop their skills
- Redesigning our **training for new volunteers** in line with the new Citizens Advice learning model so that they will develop the skills for dealing with full advice as quickly as they are happy to do so
- Improving the way we **recruit volunteers**, so they get a better idea of what to expect before they join
- Designing a new **leaflet for volunteers** that summarises what they can expect from their volunteer experience and how they can raise ideas and any concerns.

Again in response to volunteer feedback, our Crowborough supervisor and induction lead Pauline Townsend has lead work with our Receptionists to develop their role as **Information Assistants** so they can help clients with information when all our advisers are busy. We are very grateful to the Sussex Community Foundation whose generous support has made this project possible.



Research & Campaigns

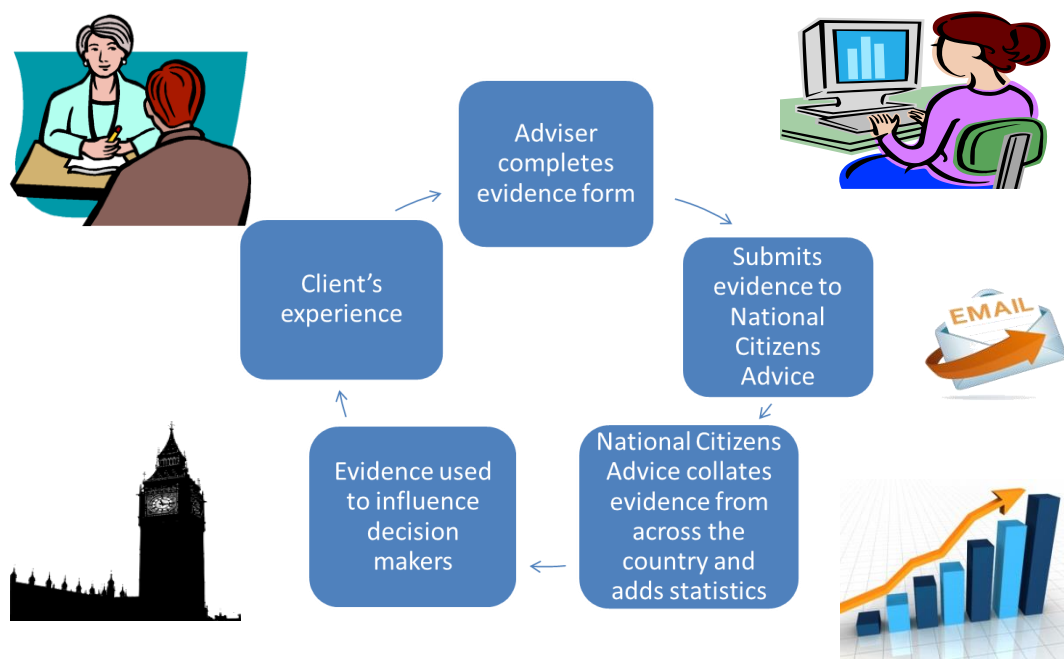
Research and Campaigns is a twin aim of our service. As a service we have a huge amount of insight and data about the problems our clients face and can use this to:

- Identify the policies and practices that have a negative impact on people's lives
- Influence decision makers to change policies and practices.

We have worked particularly hard to raise our game in this area over the last year, both in terms of input to national campaigns and local issues. This would not have been possible without the efforts of Ann Kates, our Hailsham supervisor, and a small band of dedicated volunteers.

National campaigning

The main way we effect change nationally is to share examples of the impact of policies and procedures on our clients with National Citizens Advice. Citizens Advice then use these examples and statistical evidence from across the service to make the case for change to decision makers.



Last year we submitted 339 evidence forms to National Citizens Advice on the following issues:

- 173 on the benefit system, especially delays, poor helpline services and the operation of the system for Personal Independence Payments (114)
- 60 on housing as part of the Citizens Advice *Settled and Safe* campaign
- 72 on employment, including the impact of zero hours contracts
- 34 on consumer goods and services

Local campaigning

We conduct our local campaign and research work in a number of different ways - sometimes we are focused on raising people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities and at other times we are working to change local practice and procedure. Here are just a few examples of what we have achieved.....

Keeping warm and well

This has been a real priority for us over the last year. Carol Clark, our dedicated fuel poverty champion, delivered 11 Energy Best Deal sessions over the year. She reached 206 consumers and professionals with advice on switching and energy efficiency. Virtually every participant thought the sessions were useful and around two thirds said they would probably take action as a result.



Phil Carpenter, our Hailsham Research & Campaigns volunteer, followed this up with an idea for targeted energy advice for the over 55s - delivering a pilot project with Carol at the Cedars in Hailsham which we hope to replicate elsewhere next winter.



Consumer spending at Christmas

We did a press release and poster campaign with advice on consumer rights in the run up to Christmas and Martha Mayes, our Uckfield Supervisor, did a piece on Uckfield FM.

Working with local businesses

With our colleagues in Citizens Advice East Sussex, we collated evidence on zero hours contracts. This has led to local employers signing a pledge not to use such contracts routinely.



With Trading Standards we also ran a well-received seminar for local letting agents on their legal responsibilities, which we are following up this year with work on fees.

Working with Wealden District Council (WDC)

We have shared our experience of the plight of the single homeless in Wealden with WDC, especially the hidden homeless who are sofa surfing to avoid being out on the street. We have helped promote the Big Wealden Switch and have worked with WDC on council tax enforcement. National Citizens Advice have used this co-operation as an example of model enforcement practice when talking to the press.

Partnerships

We are a small charity with big ambitions to provide the best possible service we can to our clients. We can only do this by working in partnership with both statutory services and other local voluntary organisations. Here are just a few examples of how working together is helping achieve better outcomes for our clients.

Citizens Advice East Sussex (CAES)

We are a consortium of 5 East Sussex Citizens Advice services, Eastbourne, Hastings 1066, Lewes District, Rother District and ourselves. Together we have:

- Implemented ADVICELINE across the county - this has expanded the availability of telephone advice across the county - helping 30% more people this year over the phone than we were able to do in 2014/15
- Delivered cross county projects e.g. First Aid for Debt East Sussex
- Made successful joint funding bids e.g. for energy advice and to local Clinical Commissioning Groups for specialist welfare benefits and money advice.

East Sussex Advice Partnership (ESAP)

Secured funding for specialist welfare benefits advice across the District and money advice for the High Weald Lewes Havens Clinical Commissioning Group area.

East Sussex Energy Partnership (ESEP)

With Wealden District Council, Sussex Community Development Association and Action in Rural Sussex, delivered energy advice and energy pop up shops.

East Sussex Rural Liaison Group & Wealden Strategic Partnership

Over the past year the Rural Liaison network has gone from building awareness of the range of services available across the county to looking at how we can better share information and develop more effective referral networks between us to increase the reach of all our services; this is feeding into the Wealden Strategic Partnership.

Building awareness of the availability of local service

We attended more than 20 events across the county, e.g. Wealden District Council's Coffee, Cakes and Computers sessions, Information days at Willingdon and Pevensey and the events for older people organised in Crowborough and Polegate.

Local charities

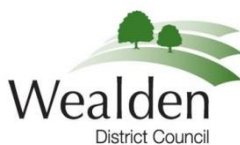
The Friends of Crowborough CAB and Uckfield Lions helped us maintain our money advice service in the north of the District and replaced our worn out chairs in Uckfield. Our grateful thanks to both.

Thank you!

As ever there are many people to thank for supporting us in the work we do.

Thank you first and foremost to our dedicated staff and fantastic volunteer team without whom we would not have a service.

- Dawson Hart for being our honorary legal advisers and for their provision of free legal advice to our clients
- Chris Green of CNG Law, Rix & Kay Solicitors, Kay & Pascoe Solicitors and Whitfield & Co for providing free legal advice to our clients
- The National Lottery Big Lottery Fund for funding our First Aid for Debts (FADES) project and our Better Together Project
- Sussex Community Foundation for helping us develop our volunteer roles
- Citizens Advice East Sussex colleagues for all their support and without whom ADVICELINE would not have been possible
- The Friends of Crowborough CAB for all their fundraising efforts
- Our partners: Age UK East Sussex, Brighton Housing Trust, SEAP, East Sussex Disability Association, Home Start East Sussex, SOMPRITI Sussex Community Development Association, Rotherfield St Martin, Hailsham Food Bank, Clued-up.info for all they have done to help us offer improved services to our clients
- Thank you to our local councils for their support both financial and practical: Wealden District Council, Crowborough, Uckfield, Hailsham and Polegate Town Councils and the Parish Councils of: Arlington, Buxted, Chiddingly, Hadlow Down, Hartfield, Heathfield & Waldron, Hellingly, Horam, Laughton, Maresfield, Pevensy, Rotherfield, Wadhurst, Warbleton, Westham and Withyham
- East Sussex County Council for funding welfare reform training & specialist benefits advice
- BarkWeb for our wonderful new website
- Uckfield Lions for the new chairs at our Uckfield office
- Cllr and Mrs Berry for their generous donation to Hailsham bureau
- All the supporters of Energy Best Deal



Need advice?

Visit the Citizens Advice website at: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Call us on: ADVICELINE 03444 111 444 9.30am - 4.00pm every weekday.

Our busiest time is before 11.00am so if your call is not urgent you should find it easier to get through later in the day.

Email us at: www.eastsussexcab.co.uk

Drop in and see us: between 9.30am and 3.00pm at.....

Crowborough Citizens Advice

Croham Lodge
Croham Road
Crowborough
East Sussex TN6 2RH

Uckfield Citizens Advice

The Hub
Civic Approach
Uckfield
East Sussex TN22 1AL

Hailsham Citizens Advice

Southview
Western Road
Hailsham
East Sussex BN27 3DN

Opening Hours

Hailsham CAB and **Uckfield CAB** are open for drop-in advice Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday.

Crowborough CAB is open for drop-in advice Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday.

There is a face to face outreach session at **Heathfield Community Centre** every **Friday 10am - 12pm**

Skype Sessions

You can reach us by skype 10am - 12 noon every day either from home or from various locations throughout the district.

Details of our outreach locations and how to contact us by skype are available on our website: www.wealdencitizensadvice.org.uk

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