

The Difference We Make

What do we do?

We provide free, confidential, independent and impartial advice and campaign on the big issues affecting people's lives. Our goal is to help everyone find a way forward, whatever problem they face.

People come to us with all sorts of issues. They may have money, benefit, housing or employment problems, they may be facing a crisis or just considering their options.

We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination wherever we see it.

People can: drop in to our offices in Crowborough, Hailsham & Uckfield; call our ADVICELINE on 03444 111444; email us at eastsussexcab.co.uk or look up advice online at citizensadvice.org.uk

Who are we?

We are a **team of 107 dedicated volunteers**, supported by a small team of 16 (8 FTE) committed, well trained staff.

We are an independent charity and, while we are part of the Citizens Advice network across England and Wales, we have to raise all our own funds.

Our advice is quality assured.

Who do we help?

- Wealden Citizens Advice helped **4,494 people with 16,912 issues** in 2017/18.
- We help anyone, but our service is used mainly by those most in need in the district.
- Our clients are 5 times as likely to be living on a low income as the national average and twice as likely to be living with a long term health condition or disability.
- This is reflected in the main reasons for seeking our help with 1 in 3 seeking our assistance with welfare benefits or tax credits and more than 1 in 5 because of financial difficulty.
- Around 1 in 10 clients seek our help because of a housing issue, with employment and relationship & family matters the other major categories.

What's the benefit of the service?

We deliver tangible benefits to our clients, for example, in the 17/18 financial year, we:

- helped 58 people who were homeless and around another 200 at risk of homelessness
- secured **around £3m in improved financial outcomes** for our clients including **around £1.8m in additional income** such as previously unclaimed benefits or tax credits
- improved health & wellbeing with **4 out of 5 clients feeling less stressed as a result of seeking our help**

A national survey of clients suggests: we help people **resolve 7 out of 10 problems**; **82% said advice improved their lives**, reducing stress and improving their finances and **9 out of 10 rated their experience with us as good or very good - the satisfaction rating was 99% for WCA** last year.

The wider impact of our service

Our impact goes well beyond those who directly seek our help. We **reduce the costs of public services**, e.g. by helping prevent evictions and homelessness; helping to maintain people in work rather than being on benefits; and through improving people's health and well-being.

Using treasury methodology we estimate that every £1 invested locally produces:

- **nearly £2.50 in savings to local & central government**, e.g. reduced health service demand, local authority homelessness services and out-of-work benefits, plus
- **over £13 in public benefit through wider economic and social benefits**. These include improvements in participation and productivity for clients and volunteers - in Wealden it would cost an extra **£516k per year** to provide the same service with paid staff, plus
- **nearly £19 in benefits to individuals**. These include income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems resolved, much of which will be spent locally.

That's **over £34 return for every £1 of funding received**. A total of **over £10m** in benefits, with **around £0.75m** of this **direct savings** to the **public purse**.

Research & campaigns - the twin aim of our service

We don't just want to help people, but improve the practices and policies that impact on their lives, so we use the experience of our clients (confidentially of course) to campaign for change. In Wealden this includes:

- The operation of the **welfare benefits system for those with long term health conditions and disabilities** (around half of all the evidence we submit to national Citizens Advice). For example we are seeing delays in appeals of 6 months with clients having to rely on Food Bank parcels to keep them going.
- **Universal Credit** - in addition to working with national Citizens Advice on amendments to the national operation of Universal Credit such as the introduction of a free DWP helpline and the abolition of the 7 day waiting period for the new benefit, we have campaigned with local councillors to bring face to face job coach support to Wealden.
- **Fuel poverty** - our *Warm in Wealden* campaign helped local residents secure average savings on their fuel bills of over £300 per year in addition to identifying additional benefits and energy efficiency measures.
- **Lack of affordable housing**, we contributed to national Citizens Advice's campaign to end high fees for private tenants looking for accommodation and are now monitoring the impact of the new Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Raising public awareness on how they can protect themselves against **SCAMs**

How can you help?

Volunteer with us! We have roles as: advisers, administrators, researchers, campaigners and fundraisers. Full training is provided.

Help us publicise what we do. The more people know about us the more we can help, so if you know of websites & publications where we should be promoting our service, let us know.

Make a donation We have to raise all our own funds, whether this be from local councils, the lottery, the NHS, charitable trusts or local fundraising. Find out how at:

www.wealdencitizensadvice.org.uk

Ideas We are keen to take advice into the community - any ideas about how we can make that happen - get in touch. **Admin contact (not advice)** da@wealdencitizensadvice.org.uk