



Uttlesford Citizens Advice is a local charity that aims to empower residents, helping them to solve problems and find a way forward. Our service is free, confidential and independent. Our support helps people to:

- understand their rights and responsibilities;
- overcome digital barriers;
- budget;
- talk - we often advocate for them with 3rd parties;
- take practical steps to improve their situations

We provide general advice in housing, benefits, immigration, community care, relationship and consumer law. Our volunteer advisers support homeless clients and people who need our help following violence, abuse or discrimination. In addition, we have teams of specialists who cover the following areas:

- Debt
- Disability Benefits
- Energy efficiency and fuel poverty
- Welfare support for cancer patients and their families, funded by Macmillan Cancer Support

Over the last year:

- We helped 725 unique clients from Saffron Walden, (293 resident in Shire Ward, 248 in Castle Ward and 184 from Audley Ward). Many used our service more than once for help to deal with 2,663 separate issues.
- 977 of these issues related to benefits; this reflects the lack of a job centre in Uttlesford.
- 246 issues related to utilities – clients worried about being able to afford their utility bills and looking for ways to become more energy efficient.
- 241 issues related to debt. Council tax arrears were the most common issue, followed by fuel debts, credit card debts and rent arrears.
- We helped Saffron Walden residents with 171 housing issues; 13 were homelessness issues. (Homelessness in Uttlesford is largely 'hidden'. We are less likely to see people sleeping in the streets; instead we know people are sofa surfing, taking shelter in churches or barns and sleeping in cars or vans.)
- 49% of Saffron Walden clients described themselves as having a disability or long-term health condition (476 elected to answer this question).
- Our specialist team of disability benefits experts helped 131 residents to apply for Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance, bringing an additional £400,309 income into the town. Residents generally use this extra money to cover utility bills, pay for help around the home, to buy mobility aids or pay for transport to appointments.

- Our Energy Specialists provided casework support to 62 residents who were struggling with high fuel bills, poor energy efficiency or cold and damp homes., achieving almost £42,000 in extra benefits, emergency fuel payments and grants for energy efficient improvements to their homes.
- We continued to work extensively with Uttlesford Foodbank, clothing and baby banks and local trusts and funds and helped 102 Saffron Walden residents access food parcels, gas and electricity top ups and emergency funds to enable them to heat their homes, travel to essential appointments and pay for prescriptions and medical supplies.
- We took part in several social media campaigns, promoting action around scam awareness, the cost of living crisis, benefit uptake, volunteers' week, consumer issues, support for Ukrainian refugees, transport issues, postal strikes, covid and self-isolation, fuel poverty and cold weather payments.

Client Feedback

A quarterly client satisfaction survey is undertaken by the national body of Citizens Advice on our behalf. The Results and analysis are reported to the Council on a quarterly basis and to our Trustee Board with recommendations, where appropriate, which are incorporated into the Business and Development Plan.

Of the 156 clients surveyed over the last year, 93% said that our advisers helped them to find a way forward with their issue, 96% said that they were able to access our service without difficulty, 82% said that we had resolved their problem and 94% would recommend our service to family or friends. Please find below a selection of the comments made by clients taking part in the latest survey:

"I am so grateful for this organisation! Many people would be lost without them, we can't thank them enough for the work they carry out. The staff are amazing and ever so helpful. They change lives and never get enough credit for it, they really are heroes! I can never thank them enough!"

"I would and have recommended your services. To complete a 29 page Attendance Allowance form is extremely stressful but Citizens Advice provided all the professional help required. They also gave advice with regard to services available for my husband who has been diagnosed with Mixed Dementia. I have been advised that we are able to apply for a Blue Badge and they are again helping with this application. I cannot speak too highly of their excellent service and friendly manner. Thank you very much."

"They help always. They make you feel that nothing is a problem for them and all this gives you the confidence that all will be well."

"In a nutshell and without exaggeration, I do believe CAB savedmy life."

Looking forward

As the economic situation continues to get worse for residents with inflation, interest rate rises and further significant increases in household bills we will continue to work proactively with clients by targeting budgeting help, for example by offering drop in debt and money advice sessions at outreach locations.

Our staff continue to work tirelessly to meet demand, however a difficult recruiting environment and inflating costs places constraints on our ability to meet growing need in the district. We are therefore grateful to Saffron Walden Town Council for their continuing and longstanding support for our service.