

Citizens Advice Thanet

The people's champion



Annual report 2023-24

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Chair's report



Taking over the Chair from Danni Barnes in November 2023 was an absolute pleasure, knowing that Citizens Advice Thanet has weathered the various storms and is in great shape.

We are all grateful to Danni for her leadership during the past years and for leaving such a positive legacy.

One of Danni's last responsibilities was working with the Chief Officer, Angela Drew-Robinson, to succeed in the **Year 3 Leadership Assessment**, with strong scores across all aspects of the leadership and quality of our service delivery. This is an excellent foundation to the work of the whole team, which is growing in confidence and demonstrates great dedication and determination to helping our community in Thanet.

Demand for the services of Citizens Advice continues to grow as households grapple with the ongoing cost of living crisis. Our aim is to expand our services to be able to meet the increased demand, particularly from families and individuals who find it difficult to access help. Funding growth is an ongoing challenge in an environment of rising costs across the board, but the 3-year grant that Angela **successfully bid for from National Lottery** has been a most welcome boost. This has supplemented our very essential core funding from Thanet District Council and a grant from Ramsgate Town Council, and has allowed us to establish outreach services across the district, to some of those harder to reach communities.

I'm delighted to welcome some new faces to the Trustee board, as some of our long serving members have stood down. We have a great range of skills and experience that we can put to the service of Citizens Advice Thanet.

We are on track now to get back to helping the numbers of clients that we achieved pre-pandemic. Looking to the year ahead we want to continue to increase access to our advice services and to increase the numbers of people we can assist using all the channels at our disposal – telephone, online and social media, and face to face. This will mean growing the staff and volunteers working for Thanet residents. We are actively looking at new funding sources and local partnerships that will support our growth ambitions and make the service more sustainable. [If you would like to support our growth as a volunteer or a fundraiser – please get in touch via \[volunteers@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk\]\(mailto:volunteers@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk\).](#)

This has been a good year and I'm really positive about our opportunities to do even better in the years ahead.

Sharon Wilding
Chair of Trustees

Our purpose

To shape a society where people face far fewer problems.

We're driven by our ambition to make things better for people, individually and collectively, and by the power of good advice to help people solve their problems.

We provide free, independent, impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Sharon Wilding

Chair, from November 2023

Sarah Ellis

Vice Chair

Simon Farrer

Treasurer

Helen Mitchell

Connor Harney

From November 2023

Bernadette Hawkes

From March 2024

Nicola Parmar

From July 2024

Geoff Lindley

Resigned November 2023

Dannielle Barnes

Resigned June 2024

Heidi Coleman

From Nov 2023 - June 2024

Rebecca Kirkpatrick

Resigned July 2023

Jenny Matterface

Local Authority Rep

David Green

Local Authority Rep

Samuel Phillips

Staff Rep

STAFF

Angela Drew-Robinson

Chief Officer

Jaime Cortinas

Advice Service Co-ordinator

Lyn Craswell

Adviser/Session Supervisor

Samuel Phillips

Better Lives Project Worker

Samantha Stone

Better Lives Project Worker

Charlie Ferguson

Finance Assistant

Mags Korczak

Telephone Adviser

Mandy Oliver

Administrator

VOLUNTEERS

- Jan Robinson
- Martin Hydes
- Dave Prodrick
- Penny Fielder
- Dawn Thompson
- Eileen Chisholm
- Brian Kemble
- Andy Flood
- Caroline Nuttall
- Marie Houlihan
- John Hawting
- Kate Welch
- Steve Tennison
- Sue Bird
- Maureen Clarke
- Rinaldo Besate
- Sue Longden
- Maria Brazil
- Magdalena Korczak
- Jane Wood
- Rosalind Nelson
- Christine Cardosi
- Zayda Kebede
- Oscar Ellis
- Simon Kirby
- Gary Turner

Chief Officer's report



2023-24 has seen a dramatic recovery in the reach of our services.

We have increased the number of clients dealt with by over 100% (1076 in 2022/23 to 2278 in 2023/24), giving much needed advice to our local community. Our plan is to continue this growth.

All the above needs funding and we are extremely grateful for the continued support from Thanet District Council and Ramsgate Town Council as well as the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, National Lottery Awards for All, the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund and Kent Community Foundation. See page 8 for more details on how we are benefiting from the generosity of these organisations.

We also thank those that have made private donations to our service, all monies are greatly appreciated. Don't forget if you are a taxpayer you could get a tax deduction by making a donation!

As the Cost of living is still making life difficult for many to meet their basic living costs, the Household Support Fund has provided some relief for people that fit the eligibility. We continued our work to assist Thanet District Council with a further tranche of the Household Support Fund. **We distributed £108,000 to 411 households in need**, through Food vouchers, School Uniform Vouchers and essential energy saving items, such as Air Fryers, Microwaves, heated throws, slow cookers and white goods such as washing machines, cookers, fridge/freezers. Everyone assessed received information and advice regarding income maximisation, budgeting and energy saving advice.

We have an improved new website, thanks to one of our volunteers with expertise in this field. We are slowly building up our Social Media presence, a task taken on by our youngest volunteer.

Our Volunteers contributed 4271 hours during 2023/24! We are greatly appreciative for the work that they do, giving up their time for their local community.

I am proud to be leading and working with a hardworking team of staff and volunteers at Citizens Advice Thanet who are committed to provide the highest quality of advice to our community. It cannot be underestimated how good timely advice can improve wellbeing and reduce stress. The most important step is making the first move to ask for help.

Angela Drew-Robinson
Chief Officer

Client feedback

**We just wanted to say
'thank you'.**

You have been so kind, given us help that is so valuable because it has given me some sort of independence.

Treasurer's report



The past year has been a positive one for Citizens Advice Thanet. Like many organisations, the Covid Pandemic had a big effect on the organisation.

However, this year we have seen many green shoots as the service has rebuilt and seen its capacity to support the people of Thanet grow.

We are so grateful to all our funders. A big thank you to Thanet District Council, Ramsgate Town Council, Citizens Advice National, The National Lottery Community Fund, and all those who have made donations. Without you, we would not have been able to support the many people of Thanet that we have helped over the past year.

Our total income for the year was £359,836, up from £144,773 in 2023. Included was funding from The National Lottery Awards for All Fund for upgrading our outdated IT equipment, Household Support Funding from Thanet District Council, and Project funding from The National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund to extend our services to outreach centres within the district. Expenditure for the year totalled £291,724. The IT funding was received at the end of the financial year and the expenditure occurred in the new financial year. The Household Support fund provided for grants to be made to clients who were in need and met the project criteria.

As is always the case, as a people-focused service, our largest expense is our staffing costs. The Trustees continued to be mindful of the effect of the financial crisis on our staff. Remuneration was kept under review with salaries increased, within the financial restraints, to appropriately reward staff.

Charity funds at the end of the year were made up of Restricted Funds of £29,667, Designated Funds covering charity closure and fixed assets of £46,403, and Unrestricted Funds of £165,362, which provide our operating reserve.

In order to continue the rebuilding of the service further bids are being made to secure funding to maintain the services currently being provided, and to build on these to increase our capacity to help more people.

I would like to thank Angela our chief officer and Charlie our finance assistant for all the work they do in the day-to-day management of our finances, also thank you to our Accountant and Independent Examiner, Stephen Wren of Accountancy Matters.

Simon Farrer
Treasurer

Thank you!



We would like to especially thank both **Thanet District Council** and **Ramsgate Town Council** for their longstanding support and confidence in the service we offer at Citizens Advice Thanet.

The funding for both Mill Lane and our core grant is provided by **Thanet District Council**. We maintain a presence in Ramsgate at the Plains of Waterloo office because of the **Ramsgate Town Council** funding. As a result, we can deliver our vital services to the community of Thanet. We, along with the thousands of people we are able to help, are very grateful to the Councils for their continued support.



A special thank you must go to **National Lottery Reaching Communities** for funding our 'Better Lives Thanet' project. This has enabled us to employ two generalist advisers for 3 years. The project started in September last year and I am pleased to say 'we are doing what it says on the tin'. More about this in the project advisers report.

Thank you also to **National Lottery 'Awards for All'** which has enabled us to replace our out-of-date IT equipment - so crucial for the smooth operation of our service. And to Kent Community Foundation for funding some of our Volunteer Training costs.




The **UK Shared Prosperity Scheme**, under the UK Government Levelling up initiative, provided us £10,000 to recruit a part-time fixed term telephone adviser in the 2024/5 year, under our Community Connect project focusing on the most deprived wards in our Local Authority.



Funding from **Thanet District Council RISE** (Rough Sleeper Intervention Support and Empowerment) multi agency partnership supporting those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, continued up until September 2023, for a part-time Welfare Benefit and Money Adviser.

Client feedback



Thank you so much again for your unbelievable help today. It's nice to know we aren't alone.

Reaching Communities Outreach Project



By Samuel Phillips
Reaching Communities Project Worker

The Reaching Communities – Better Lives project, funded by the National Lottery, began late last year with Sam Stone and me as outreach advisors, and it has been a great success thus far.

We have partnered with various agencies, organizations, public spaces, and religious institutions to provide our advisory service in an accessible and flexible manner.

This has been facilitated through drop-in sessions, scheduled appointments, participation in health and family days, and home visits to clients who are in particular need.

Starting with just two drop-in locations, we now have a presence across 17 different sites multiple times a month, covering both large and small areas of Thanet. This expansion has provided our clients with more opportunities than ever before to access our advice service. In conjunction with this, we also attend community fairs and health/care days with our stall to offer a public community advice service, as demonstrated by our recent participation in the Ellington Park family day.

In the past year, we have assisted:



...exceeding our target of 500 clients!

We have also connected and built relationships with numerous organizations, including local churches, food banks, rough sleeping teams, nursing groups, the DWP, Social Services, council housing teams, and libraries, creating a robust network of professionals to whom we can refer clients. We look forward to the next year of this project and to continuing to offer a flexible, holistic service to the people of Thanet

Client feedback

RAMSGATE LIBRARY SAYS:

“The drop-in sessions at the library have been successful and gives the community the opportunity to speak with an advisor immediately. The library has also been able to signpost the public to the sessions that take place in all our Thanet branches. This is a great way to work in partnership and we hope to see sessions happen in the branches over time.”

ST PETERS BAPTIST CHURCH FOODBANK SAYS:

“Sam and Sam have been attending the foodbank and offering one-to-one appointments. They are friendly and approachable and quickly build trust with people. This style of service makes advice and information more easily accessible to our customers. Many don't know how to access Citizens Advice or have tried previously and not been able to. Also, many of our foodbank customers struggle to remember and keep appts so having a regular drop-in is really helpful. It really does reach hard to reach people! The only improvement is for them to come in more than once a month!”

You all deserve so much credit for your kindness and professionalism. I can't thank or praise you enough; you made me feel supported and valued, not as someone in need but as someone you genuinely wanted to help.

A special thank you to Sam and the rest of the team for being there to solve my problems with such compassion and care.

National Volunteer Week 2024



Volunteer week celebrations

This year we celebrated our 40th Volunteers week at Citizens Advice.

Our dedicated volunteers give their time to provide much needed support and advice to the people of Thanet. Some of our volunteers have been with us now for over 12 years!

A wonderful afternoon tea at the Walpole Bay Hotel was enjoyed all attendees. A huge heartfelt thank you to you all!

“It’s the most rewarding thing I’ve done!”

Citizens Advice Volunteer, Dave Prodrick

My volunteering journey led to Thanet Adviceline, Mags Korczak



I moved to Margate in 2021 having purchased a 'doer-upper' flat. However, despite great optimism and excitement, in retrospect I was naive about the employment opportunities in the area.

I kept a part-time job in Parliament but the commute to Westminster became unsustainable and I was deeply unhappy. Whilst on a training course we were encouraged to 'remember who you are'. Post Covid, and after several traumatic events, I had entirely forgotten who I was. That simple statement had a profound effect on me.

After some deep reflection I took stock and contacted Citizens Advice Thanet in September 2023 to enquire about volunteer adviser opportunities. I began volunteering one day per week on a Monday afternoon and soon got back into the swing of things. This wasn't my first foray into volunteering with Citizens Advice. In 2018/2019, I had been a volunteer Gateway Adviser at Citizens Advice Havering, and I realised I missed the satisfaction it brought to help those in need and to see the relief and peace that such help enabled. I thought volunteering again would help rebuild my confidence and skills, and it truly did.

In 2024, when the telephone adviser job came up, I was keen to apply. By the time the job was advertised, I had stopped working at Parliament but struggled to find work. Fortunately, I was successful, and I now walk to work, and my life has improved exponentially. From starting off as a volunteer, I am now managing the telephone adviceline (it is only me at the moment!) funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Scheme.

The Thanet Adviceline is a vital and necessary service. When I was conducting face to face appointments as a volunteer, I would see one client per week on one issue. Now I can take up to eight calls per day all on manner of subjects. People often don't know who to turn to or are so overwhelmed with the overprovision of information online (oftentimes contradictory), they need to discuss their next steps or options with a neutral and impartial party.

I'm hesitant to rely upon the old cliché, but what I enjoy most is that no two days are ever the same on the Adviceline, and the variety keeps me interested and intellectually challenged. On the day of writing this piece, I had two different maternity related employment queries, a request for financial support, and a request for assistance with a PIP application form. The day before, a query about rights related to the return of a deposit for a cancelled service, a section 8 eviction notice, and help with navigating debts. Even if I can't advise, hopefully I can signpost to another organisation or source of help to support the client.

VOLUNTEER STORY

In the three months that Thanet Adviceline has been operational, it has helped 7% of all clients presenting to the service this year. The provision of the Adviceline enables more local people to help navigate the issues they are facing, and hopefully avoid falling into crisis. With any luck, Thanet Adviceline will continue to flourish and become a permanent part of Citizens Advice Thanet's advice service offering.

Client feedback

I spoke with Mags on the phone regarding some queries about Maternity allowance, even though she wasn't able to answer my query directly she took the time to look into the different options.

I found it really beneficial and Mags was super helpful, would recommend calling here if in need of any advice.

Volunteering

Volunteers are the backbone of our service at Citizens Advice Thanet. We are fortunate to have a group of Volunteers, that are committed to giving the best service to the Community of Thanet. We greatly appreciate the time they give up to come along each week and volunteer.

A BIG heartfelt thank you to all of you.

Volunteering can **make a real difference** to your own life and the lives of those around you. There are loads of ways to **get involved** So how do you go about finding the right volunteering role for you?

- **Think about what interests** or excites you. This could be something you enjoyed doing before, or something completely new.
- **Think about what time** or skills you can give. With so many opportunities to choose from, it's a great idea to narrow down the choices by deciding what you're willing to give.

To be a volunteer, it takes:

Generosity

a willingness to give your time to others

Understanding

because their lives might be very different from your own

Empathy

an ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel what they must feel

Compassion

to truly care about making someone else's life better

Patience

because the process doesn't always go as smoothly as it might

Dedication

to stick with the project and see it through

If you are interested in Volunteering with at Citizens Advice Thanet
Please contact: volunteers@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk

Client feedback

It was hard for me to accept the help you gave me today as not used to it, but you helped me and made me feel a bit easier on accepting help.

Thanks to you and the team I opened up a bit more than I usually do, as I normally don't open up as much and I say I'm ok.

Key statistics

Summary

Clients	1,195
Quick client contacts	1,083
Issues	5,736
Activities	3,379
Cases	1,189

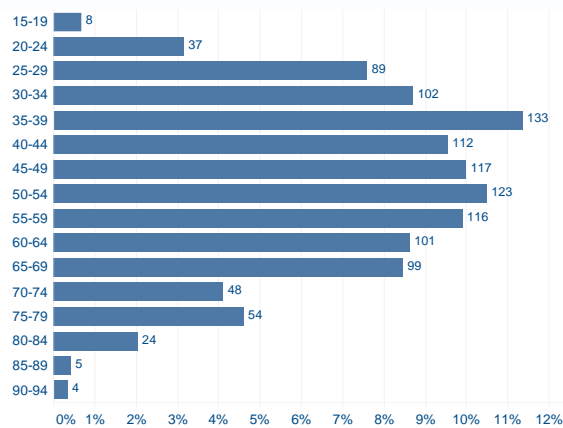
Outcomes

Income gain	£136,053
Re-imbursements, services, loans	£35,092
Debts written off	£4,465
Other	£54,709

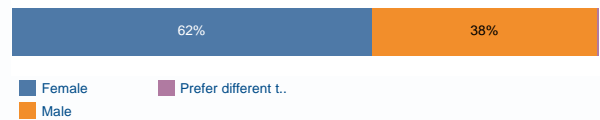
Issues

	Issues	Clients
Benefits & tax credits	2,354	677
Benefits Universal Credit	397	164
Charitable Support & Food Ban..	113	41
Consumer goods & services	191	43
Debt	340	144
Education	14	5
Employment	259	68
Financial services & capability	52	22
GVA & Hate Crime	13	8
Health & community care	68	17
Housing	865	280
Immigration & asylum	55	19
Legal	173	47
Other	50	12
Relationships & family	417	111
Tax	41	21
Travel & transport	48	25
Utilities & communications	286	126
Grand Total	5,736	

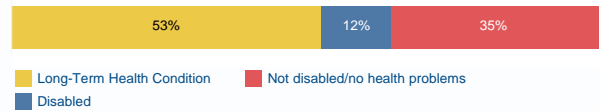
Age



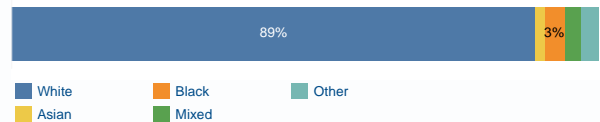
Gender



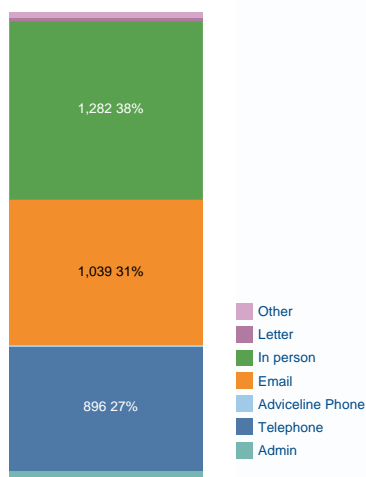
Disability / Long-term health



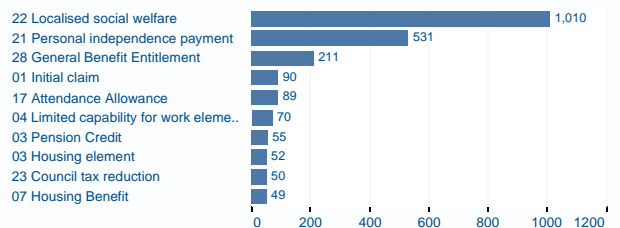
Ethnicity



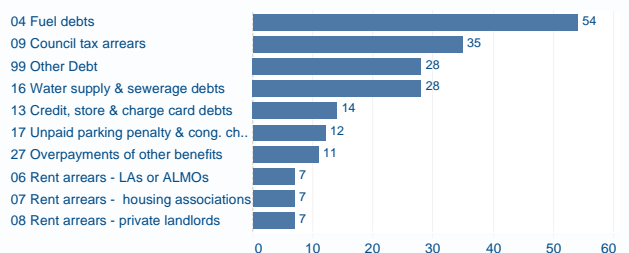
Channel



Top benefit issues



Top debt issues



Thanet community profile

In order to develop relevant policies, and to plan and effectively run public services, it is essential that public bodies, including Citizens Advice Thanet, fully understand the demographics of local residents and their associated needs. This Community Profile aims to provide an outline of the District of Thanet and the report should be used as a tool to provide a context and overview of the local community. The profile outlines various statistics that have been reached based on the research and analysis of key data information that has been collected from a wide range of sources including central and local government, a number of partner organisations and a series of independent bodies.

Thanet to the North East of Kent is largely a coastal district, with north, east and southeast facing coastlines. Historically, the main towns of Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate were traditional seaside holiday towns, but have suffered from seasonal unemployment and deprivation.

Thanet District has an estimated population of 140,700. 50% of the population are over 40. There has been a 17% increase in people over the age of 65 since the last census. It suffers from long-term economic and social problems and contains the two most deprived wards in Kent, Margate Central and Cliftonville West. Thanet continues to rank as the most deprived local authority in Kent (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019). Thanet is the fifth most deprived local authority in the country for the IMD 2019 indicator measuring children and young people's education, skills and training.

The unemployment level is the 4th highest of all the districts in the South East region. There are high levels of economic inactivity. Unemployment is currently 4% compared to a South East average of 2.9%.

Being the most deprived local authority in Kent, the cost-of-living crisis has made a huge impact on many in our community. This is also bringing a whole new cohort of people in need of advice, that have not been affected in the past. This is due to unprecedented rocketing prices of energy, food and housing.

Thanet has the:

- highest proportion of disability benefit claimants in the county 11.4% of the population claiming DLA, PIP and AA.
- highest proportion of SEN generally amongst children and in particular the highest level of autism.
- the highest number and proportion of children living in absolute low-income families in Kent.

Even more reasons why our service is essential in Thanet

AGM

We held the 2023 AGM at Pierremont Hall, Broadstairs on 29th November. The meeting was presented by Chief Officer Angela Drew-Robinson and Danni Barnes the Chair.

After the usual reports were delivered the meeting had the opportunity to listen to some impact stories that our staff had been involved in over the year as well as a presentation on sustainable energy grants by Eve Lockton-Goddard.

A huge 'Thank You' to all those who attended.

The 2024 AGM will be held in Margate in November. Details will be published on our website in the autumn.

This is an open meeting, so members of the public are welcome. For more information please email: admin@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk

Missions

1. Provide advice fit for the future – we'll be there for people when they need us in the ways that make the biggest impact.
2. Close the gap – we'll end the disparities in access and experience for marginalised people.
3. Take early action – we'll prevent more people reaching crisis by addressing problems earlier.

Established in 1939 as an emergency war service, the Citizens Advice Service has developed into the UK's largest independent advice provider.

CURRENT OPENING TIMES

Drop-in sessions

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning 9.30am to 12.30pm at our Ramsgate Office.

Face-to-face appointments can be booked where needed.

You can access our service by contacting us by email or phone. We are operating Monday to Friday.

Email: enquiries@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk

Adviceline: 0808 2787998

Website: www.thanetcitizensadvice.org

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Editor Angela Drew-Robinson

With thanks to all staff and volunteers who contributed to the compilation and proof reading of this Annual Report and apologies for any omissions or errors in the text.

Company Reg No: 4176324
Charity No: 1086799 FCA FRN617770

**citizens
advice**

Thanet