

Annual Report 2022-23



Thanet

Citizens Advice Thanet

Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, CT9 1LB

www.thanetcitizensadvice.org

enquiries@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk

Company Reg No: 4176324

Charity No: 1086799 FCA FRN617770

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Chair's Report

The last year has seen a **transformation in the service**, despite bouncing from the pandemic straight into a cost-of-living crisis, the service has gone from strength to strength and is steadily building back to where we were before Covid hit. That said it has not been easy, and as with all local services, we come across fires each day that need fighting, resources remain extremely stretched, funding is tight, and the needs of our clients are more complex than ever before. Our staff team and incredible team of volunteers do outstanding work every single day, and I am continually in awe of the impact they have on the local community.

Although it took place outside the AGM reporting year, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the success at our recent **Year 3 Leadership Self-Assessment**, which took place in September 2023 but was a reflection on the last year. The LSA reviews all aspects of the service's leadership and quality of our delivery, and we scored well across the board despite the framework changing mid-way through our assessment period. This incredible outcome was the culmination of a huge amount of hard work across our management team and Trustees, my thanks go out to all involved and credit to Angela, our Chief Officer who has steered Citizens Advice Thanet brilliantly since taking on the role in December 2021.

Our focus for the year ahead is to continue to seek funding to support specialist advice services, expand our opening times as we bring on more volunteers and establish more outreach partnerships with agencies across Thanet to expand our reach.

This is my final AGM as Chair at Citizens Advice Thanet, I have been proud to be a volunteer, a project worker, and a Trustee and it has been an absolute privilege. Although I must turn my focus to my full-time job and my two small boys, I remain committed to the service and will continue to support as much as I can. Citizens Advice is one of the most valuable services, it is the bedrock of the advice sector. Against the backdrop of spiraling prices, rising debt levels and deteriorating mental health, Thanet residents need the service more than ever before, so if you would like to support as a volunteer or a fundraiser – get in touch with volunteers@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk.

Finally, I want to wish all at Citizens Advice Thanet every success for the coming years and thank you to colleagues on the Board for their support as I stepped into the role of Chair.

Danni Barnes

Chair of Trustees

Our Mission Statement

"To provide the advice people need for the problems they face. To improve policies and practices that affect people's lives."

Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

STAFF

ANGELA DREW-ROBINSON
CHIEF OFFICER

Jaime Cortinas
Advice Service Co-ordinator

Lyn Craswell
Adviser/Session Supervisor

Samuel Phillips
RISE project worker

Charlie Ferguson
Finance Assistant

VOLUNTEERS

- Jan Robinson
- Martin Hyde
- Dave Proderick
- Penny Fielder
- Dawn Thompson
- Eileen Chisholm
- Brian Kemble
- Andy Flood
- Caroline Nuttall
- Marie Houlihan
- John Hawting
- Kate Welch
- Steve Tennison
- Karen Leopold
- Debra Bond
- Rinaldo Besate
- Sue Longden

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Danni Barnes
Chair

Sarah Ellis
Vice Chair, from 1st August 2022

Simon Farrer
Treasurer

Geoff Lindley

Helen Mitchell
from 2nd August 2022

Rebecca Kirkpatrick

Sheila Ramdular
Resigned 28th March 2023

Andy Wallis
Resigned 13th December 2022

Maggie Fairweather
Resigned 13th December 2022

Heather Keen Cllr
Local Authority Rep

Aram Rawf Cllr
Local Authority Rep

Jaime Cortinas
Staff Rep

Andrew Flood
Volunteer Rep



Trustee Article

“I was shocked to realise how little I knew about Citizens Advice services!”

Despite having been aware of Citizens Advice probably all of my adult life, it was when my eldest son, Joe, began his volunteer training that I took more of an interest. And as he progressed from Volunteer to Debt Advisor to Housing Caseworker, I learned more and more about what sits behind the **amazing services offered**.

Most importantly I realised how ignorant I was about how Citizens Advice works – I admit I had not thought deeply about it but, if pressed, I would have said it was a government agency. I had no idea it was a charity, and subject to all the pressures of fundraising and resourcing that come with that territory.

So, when I learned there were Trustee vacancies at Thanet, I jumped at the chance to get involved, learn more, and contribute to the objectives of this local team.

I bring several years of experience as a Trustee, including a period as Chair, at the Kent MS Therapy Centre in Canterbury, along with many more years' experience as a leading team as a marketing director and small business owner. Which is why, despite my lack of Citizens Advice background, I was able to agree to take on the position as Chair when Danni steps down at the AGM 2023. Thankfully she will be staying on as a Trustee to hold my hand while I learn the ropes!

It's really a great time to be joining as the existing team have seen us through the pandemic, creating a strong foundation on which to build the services into 2023 and beyond. The cost-of-living crisis in the UK is driving demand for help and advice in our community higher and higher, and Citizens Advice Thanet has to grow to be able to meet this demand.

As a newcomer I know I've got a lot to learn, but I'm looking forward to being part of this next growth phase. If you think you would like to join our Trustee Board, please feel free to contact me to find out more about what is involved and if it is for you.

Sharon Wilding

Trustee (from May 2023)

FROM THE CHIEF

The year 2022-23 has been another challenging year for all of us. On the tail of the Pandemic appeared the 'Cost of Living' Crisis, but 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.

We are making a good recovery from the effects of the Pandemic period. Funding from Ramsgate Town Council has enabled us to recruit a part-time Adviser/Supervisor to work from our Ramsgate Office. Accompanied by newly trained volunteer advisers, we have increased our capacity to advise and started our first post pandemic 'drop in' session in Ramsgate. With more to follow!

Kent Community Foundation provided funding to pay for external training for eight volunteer advisers. Volunteers must be prepared to study and work through an intensive learning program to meet the standards of the Advice Quality Service. We are pleased to say that increasing our Volunteer Adviser numbers has enabled us to deal with 15% more enquiries in 2022-23. We aim to keep this up-ward trajectory going, always mindful that quality of advice must be paramount.

We were successful in our bid for funding to provide a part-time Welfare Benefit and Money Adviser for the 'RISE' (Rough Sleeper Intervention Support and Empowerment) team with Thanet District Council (TDC). A multi-agency partnership formed by TDC to help those who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

During this year we started a bid for National Lottery Reaching Communities Funding which will fund two paid advisers to increase our capacity to give advice with a focus on delivery in Outreach locations in our community. Our research with local community groups and organisations indicated there is a need for such a service particularly around finance, budgeting, and housing issues.

Never has our service been more needed in the Community due to the continuing cost-of-living crisis. Not only the unprecedented rises in food costs and energy, but also the acute shortage of affordable housing. Rises in rents in the private rented sector have resulted in many not being able to afford the payments and increased the risk of homelessness.

In February 2023, we secured funds to distribute under the Household Support Fund scheme, TDC. In February and March, we distributed £9,000 to 106 Households in need that met the eligibility criteria. This was in the form of food vouchers and small basic household items such as microwaves, air fryers, duvets. Everyone assessed received information and advice to ensure they were not missing out on other help available, with further appointments offered where other issues were identified.

Our aim is to raise additional funds in 2023-24 to continue building the capacity of our service to empower our community to understand their rights and their options to move forward. The improvement in wellbeing due to good timely advice cannot be underestimated. The most important step is making the first move to ask for help.

Angela Drew-Robinson
Chief Officer



Treasurer's Report

Firstly, I would like to say a big thank you to all our funders. Without you, we would not have been able to support the many people of Thanet that we have helped over the past year. Thank you to Thanet District Council, Ramsgate Town Council, CitA, Kent Community Foundation and all those who have made donations.

Like many organisations, the Covid Pandemic had a big effect on the organisation. The last financial year 2022-23 was a year we sought to rebuild our capacity and to look for opportunities for further funding to enable us to expand our services to support our community.

Our total income for the year was £144,773 down from £302,990 for the previous year. Expenditure for the year was £149,923. Through careful financial management and through securing some additional funding during the year we ended the year with a relatively small in year deficit of £5150.00, which we were able to fund from our reserves. This was lower than anticipated at the start of the year.

As is always the case our largest expense is our staffing costs, being a people focused organisation. The trustees were very mindful of the effect of the financial crisis on our staff and remuneration was kept under review. Despite the financial constraints on the organisation cost of living payments and salary increases were possible.

Charity funds at the end of the year were made up of Restricted Funds of £12,306, Designated Funds covering charity closure and fixed assets of £52,098 and Unrestricted Funds of £108,916, which provide our operating reserve.

Funding bids were made during the year, and we have secured additional funding for the current year and beyond. This additional funding is enabling us to forecast a small surplus for the current year.

I would like to finish by thanking our Accountant and Independent Examiner, Stephen Wren of Accountancy Matters. I would also 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.

Simon Farrer
Treasurer

Thank You!

Special thanks to Thanet District Council

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

The funding for both Mill Lane and Plains of Waterloo offices, as well as our core grant, helps us to 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. Central Government is certainly squeezing our local Councils, but they have recognised the significant and fundamental support we are giving to the community.



Thank you to Kent Foundation

For providing funding to support our training program for Volunteer Advisers.

The impact of the funding has been to increase our capacity to supply the much-needed advice that our community needs.

This is ongoing as the funding stretches into 2023-24.



Key Statistics

Page for charts – Positional only

Key Statistics

Margate Citizens Advice Bureau

2022-23

Q1
Q2
Q3
Q4

citizens
advice

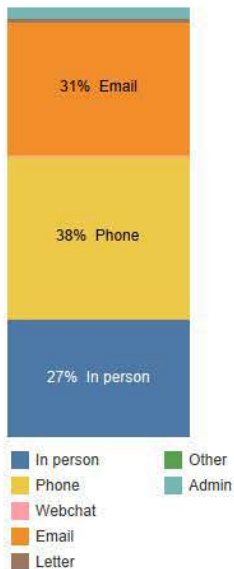
Summary

Clients	562
Quick client contacts	514
Issues	1,927
Activities	1,467
Cases	484

Outcomes

Income gain	£158,919
Re-imbursements, services, loans	£150

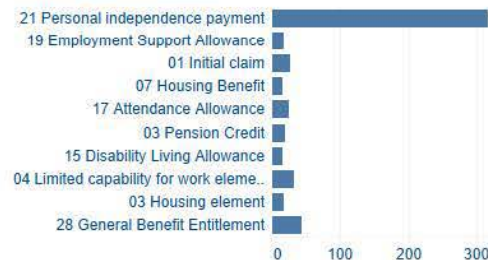
Channel



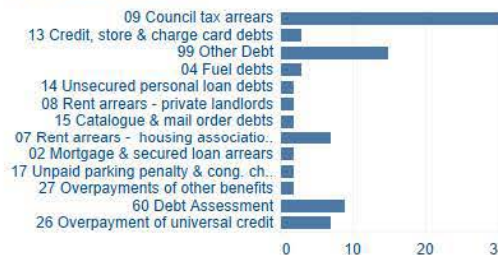
Issues

Issues	Clients
Benefits & tax credits	582
Benefits Universal Credit	145
Charitable Support & Food Ban...	100
Consumer goods & services	70
Debt	134
Education	4
Employment	127
Financial services & capability	36
GVA & Hate Crime	1
Health & community care	23
Housing	394
Immigration & asylum	19
Legal	69
Other	12
Relationships & family	147
Tax	17
Travel & transport	10
Utilities & communications	37
Grand Total	1,927

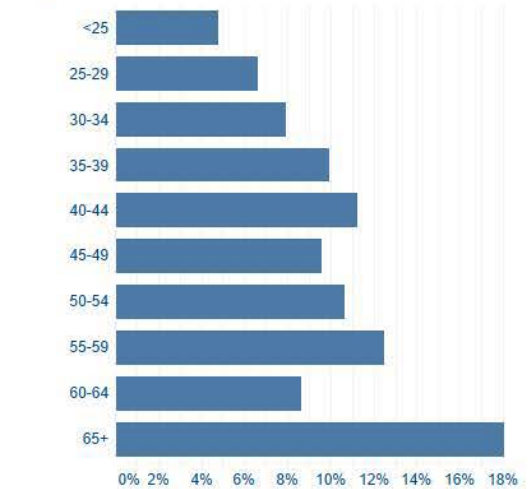
Top benefit issues



Top debt issues



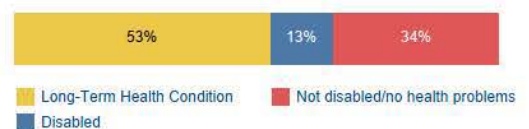
Age



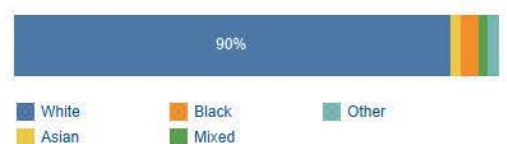
Gender



Disability / Long-term health



Ethnicity



RISE

ROUGH SLEEPER INTERVENTION SUPPORT AND EMPOWERMENT

In September 2022 Samuel joined Citizens Advice Thanet to train as a Welfare Benefit and Money Adviser for the **RISE project**. Samuel was passionate about working with street homeless and rough sleepers, he had experienced of this in his own life and had seen how easily anyone could find themselves in this position.

Samuel went through an intensive adviser learning programme and was supported by our Advice Service Co-ordinator, who had worked with RISE on an earlier project. The work was challenging, and Samuel had to work on building up the trust of the Service Users. Below is one of Samuel's Case Studies to give readers a flavour of his accomplishments with this group.

Client was referred to the RISE Project and attended a needs assessment in which we established his back- ground, needs and potential pathways forward. Client presented as very emotionally and mentally unwell, noting that he felt suicidal often and felt very little want to continue with living. Client felt very overwhelmed by debts, homelessness, and relationship issues.

Client had become homeless due to relationship break down and was extremely distraught about this. We were able to offer a temporary placement in the RISE centre on the same day which after a few months was followed by a move to a shared house in which he had his own living space. Identified that client had numerous mental and physical health conditions that would make him a valid applicant for Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

During appointments, client presented as very withdrawn and hesitant to talk about the issues he was facing, including his health. Using a holistic and gentle approach I built a relationship with the client by supporting him with debt assistance and calls, so he felt safe and secure. By using this personal approach, I was able to identify some passions and hobbies that the client felt positive about such as gaming and certain movie genres. I incorporated this into our appointments by discussing the latest updates on these which relaxed the client greatly, made him feel listened to and, as client stated, "Made it feel less clinical".

With my support client managed to work with Northwest Kent debt team and myself on supported phone calls to establish debts owed and now had a manageable payment plan that is self-sustained. We also arranged a pause on his accounts which gave him the breathing room he needed to settle in his new accommodation through Rise.

In addition to this, we arranged several appointments regarding PIP in which I used a call and response method for all questions allowing the client to work through it in small bite size sections and reduce his feeling of being overwhelmed. This resulted in a positive outcome in which he was granted PIP backdate payment of £936.59 plus a total PIP payment for one year of £3,216.20. Total amount: £4152.79.

This amount of financial support has enabled the client to pay back his debts rapidly and become nearly debt free. He also used a portion of his backdate to purchase a new gaming system which has enabled him to make new friends with shared passions online. This has boosted his confidence significantly. Client is now pursuing counselling to further develop his mental toolbox for coping with changes and stress which is something he was extremely hesitant about when first interacting with the service.

In addition to this, I was able to discuss and refer the client for the Household support fund from Citizen's Advice for £100 which allowed him to purchase groceries with the voucher and significantly reduced financial strain during a difficult month.

I have regular check ins with this client to ensure he is doing well which he stated is greatly appreciated now he is in independent accommodation. Client feels listened to and that I have been a pillar of support for him during this difficult time. Feels more confident in dealing with his own affairs and positive about his future.

Samuel Phillips
RISE Project Worker

Volunteering

VOLUNTEERING FOR CITIZENS ADVICE

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

Volunteering

David Proderick spoke to writer **Emma Cooney** about his experience as a Volunteer for Citizens Advice Thanet.

“It’s the most rewarding thing I’ve done,” says Citizens Advice Volunteer David Proderick, who calls the charity “a family”. The former diesel support engineer started volunteering 10 years ago when he retired; he says **what he missed most was people**.

There were a lot of volunteer driving jobs around, but he had driven thousands of miles for work and wanted something different. Then he remembered his mum was helped by Citizens Advice decades earlier. “It must have been the school holidays because my mum dragged me and my sister along with her,” David recalls. “She was raising two children on her own. My dad was away, and we needed financial help.”

The Ramsgate resident went along to offer his services and said he could “make tea, book people in and sweep up”.

He was soon learning to be an adviser and says the training is “second to none”.

“The hardest thing to do is to walk through the door”, he says. “Sometimes someone comes in crying and we find them an extra £100 a week, and they cry again. People don’t know what they are entitled to – especially the older people I see. Sometimes people just want someone to listen.”

As a volunteer adviser, he says you help people get through their issues and move forward. And being part of a team is invaluable. “If I don’t know the answer to something, I know where to get it.”

He added “My wife suffered quite a bit with illness and died about 5 years ago. During all that time the Citizens Advice family were there for me. There’s always someone there to support you.”

During lockdown, the charity’s lines were diverted to his home and a computer set up. “I have to be doing something” he said. “I was a man living on his own during lockdown. **Citizens Advice kept me sane**”.

Writer – Emma Cooney from Kent Coastal Volunteering.

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 highest of all the districts in the South East region. There are high levels of economic inactivity. Unemployment is currently 5.8% compared to a Kent average of 3.2%.

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

Even more reasons why our service is essential in Thanet

Client Feedback

"I found the advisor helpful in that they didn't rush me through the meeting. They were clear in terms of responding to my questions. It's the first time I felt fully listened to regarding my problems."

"We just wanted to say thank you. You have been so kind, given us your time, it has given us help that is so valuable because it has given me some sort of independence.:

"Very helpful, kind and empathetic person to talk to. Helped me logically to think through the issues I have and I have started taking steps to help myself. Thank you so much."

"My advisor was fantastic, very professional, knowledgeable and approachable."

AGM

The 2023 AGM is being held at Pierremont Hall, Pierremont Park, Broadstairs at 6.30pm Wednesday 29th November.

This is an open meeting, so members of the public are welcome.

Email: admin@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk

We held the 2022 AGM remotely.

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.

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

Aims

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

The service aims are:

To provide the advice people need for the problems they face. To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

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 morning 9.30-am to 12.30pm at our Ramsgate Office.

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

Email: enquiries@thanetcitizensadvice.org.uk

Tel: 01843 228643 (leave a message)

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

National enquiry line: 0800 144 8848

Self-help advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Citizens Advice Ramsgate

38/40 Plains of Waterloo
Ramsgate CT11 8HX

Citizens Advice Margate

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Mill Lane Margate CT9 1LB

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.

Citizens Advice Thanet

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