



Dorset

# Impact Report

# **Citizens Advice in Dorset**

## The People's Champion

2024-2025



# About us

**Citizens Advice in Dorset (CAiD)** is a consortium of three local Citizens Advice offices covering the Dorset Council area: Bridport & District, Central Dorset, and East Dorset & Purbeck. We provide free, confidential and impartial advice and information, regardless of race, gender, nationality, religion, disability, or sexual orientation, to help people find a way forward, whatever problems they face.

## Our aims

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward and we work to challenge the underlying causes of their problems

## Our principles

- Free
- Confidential
- Independent
- Impartial

We make our services accessible to the public by providing face-to-face advice in our main offices and outreach locations (advice bus, libraries, community centres), by phone through Dorset Adviceline, and through email, letter, videoconferencing, online and webchat.

We ensure that people in the Dorset Council area have access to the best possible advice services by promoting the work of Citizens Advice, and supporting the development and growth of the service.

An essential aspect of the role of Citizens Advice is to exercise a responsible influence on the development of policies and services and to ensure individuals do not suffer through a lack of knowledge or an inability to express their needs effectively, through research, media and campaign work.

The Charity's objectives are to promote any charitable purpose for the public benefit by the advancement of education, the protection and preservation of health and the relief of poverty, sickness and distress in particular, but without limitation, for the benefit of the community of Dorset and its surrounding area.

# In 2024-25 we helped



17,359 people



with 76,377 issues

## Demographics:

Largest age group supported:

**60-64** year olds

**60%** are female

**40%** are male

**10%** are disabled

**54%** have a long-term health condition

## Top issues

Benefits **26,027**

Charitable support & foodbank **15,558**

Utilities & comms **8,480**

Debt **6,222**

Housing **4,993**

# Core Service General Advice



Our general advice service is the foundation of our work and is an accessible gateway to helping people solve problems across welfare, debt, housing and homelessness, employment, law and consumer issues. It combines free expert advice with local community reach, ensuring people in need have someone to turn to, and that recurring social problems are brought to light. It acts as both a first point of contact for people in crisis or confusion and as an ongoing support and advocacy service where needed.

In the current climate of the rising cost of living pressures and complexity of problems, the service is a key part of Dorset's social safety net, saving our community the cost of resources and services in other areas.

## In 2024-2025 we...

helped to write off over  
**£1.4 million**  
in debt

generated  
**£16,728,806**  
in outcomes for  
the community

helped  
generate over  
**£13 million**  
in income for our  
clients

Our general advice provides a holistic approach, where the adviser explores all of the issues that may be affecting the client. We have a non-judgmental approach, where anyone can get help, regardless of personal circumstances.

Through our general advice, we collect evidence of issues affecting many clients which feeds into our research & campaigns work to improve policies and systems.

create awareness

influence

a voice for the  
people

# Research & Campaigns

bring about change

campaign for  
fairness



Our Research and Campaigns (R&C) work strengthens Citizens Advice's impact across Dorset by turning frontline evidence into meaningful change. By identifying emerging issues early and highlighting systemic barriers affecting our clients, we help to prevent future problems, and influence policy discussions locally and nationally. This evidence-led approach supports our mission to build a fairer, more inclusive community.

## Local Priorities and Insights

Throughout the year, we investigated several key challenges affecting Dorset residents. Evidence from our advisers highlighted:

- **Digital exclusion**, particularly among vulnerable groups needing essential online services.
- **Diminished access to banking services** following the closure of local branches.
- **Persistent issues with Housing Associations**, including delays and inconsistencies in repairs.
- **Difficulties for Universal Credit claimants** caused by the calculation of Council Tax Reduction.

These insights enabled us to raise issues directly with service providers, local authorities, and community partners, improving awareness and encouraging better practice.

## Contributions to National Campaigns

As part of the national Citizens Advice R&C programme, our advisers submitted evidence on a range of issues, including:

- Clients' understanding and experience of the Access to Work scheme.
- Barriers to affordable childcare faced by families on Universal Credit or tax credits.
- The accessibility of water and broadband social tariffs.
- The potential impact of proposed changes to PIP and Universal Credit assessments.
- Problems created by energy suppliers migrating customers to new billing platforms.
- Lack of support for people making a Universal Credit claim for the first time.
- A rise in demand for emergency and temporary accommodation, highlighting significant gaps in local housing support.
- The challenges faced by young people in debt, including limited access to appropriate debt solutions.

Our evidence contributed to national policy briefings, consultations, and campaigns, ensuring Dorset residents' experiences shaped discussions at a wider level.

## Trends Emerging from Local Evidence

Analysis of local evidence forms identified several recurring issues:

- Scam messages targeting clients about Winter Fuel Payments.
- Ongoing energy supplier billing errors and poor administrative practices.
- Inconsistent handling of Housing Association repair requests.
- Increasing concerns around energy affordability.

These trends informed both local outreach and wider advocacy efforts.

## Local Campaign Activity

Working with MPs across Dorset, we promoted a local campaign encouraging eligible state pensioners to apply for Pension Credit before the 21 December 2024 deadline. The campaign highlighted the financial value of Pension Credit and reminded residents that it unlocks access to a range of additional benefits. This targeted action helped raise awareness among low-income older residents and supported increased take-up.

help maximise  
income

PIP

# Benefits

we helped with 26,027  
benefit issues

universal credit

we helped  
9,029 people

understand the system

We support clients by helping them to understand which benefits they may be entitled to as well as providing wrap-around support in accessing those benefits through advocacy work. The top benefit issue being dealt with across the charities relates to Personal Independence Payments, where we helped 2,089 people.

## Mary's story\*

Mary had health issues and was struggling financially on Universal Credit. We helped Mary re-establish Personal Independence Payments, receiving £4,994 in back payments with a £3,778 annual award as well as supporting Mary with applying for a Household Support Fund grant. We also referred Mary to a foodbank and provided energy advice.

\*name has been changed to protect identity

"The man put me at my ease, listened empathically and translated my words into the format required by the form we were completing."

"The person who helped me was extremely professional and helpful. She was kind enough to write a letter for the review of a recent assessment for my PIP and was successful in doing so. I could not be more grateful. This was very difficult to sort out with my dyslexia."

# Income Maximisation

Many more people are seeking help with the cost of living crisis including energy bills, fuel poverty, housing costs, utilities, and food costs.

## Flo & Bill's story\*

Flo and Bill are pension age, with health conditions and were struggling financially, with Bill's health having deteriorated. A full benefits check was completed and we supported Bill in getting a review of his Attendance Allowance which increased his award, and in claiming:

**25%** reduction in Council Tax, making the couple **£7,804.82** a year better off.

\*name has been changed to protect identity

"I would like to thank CA for showing me the way to get help that I would not have got otherwise."

"The service was 100% efficient and made us aware of help that we would not have known - greatly appreciated."

specialist debt advisers

# Debt

struggling to  
pay bills

we helped with  
6,222 debt issues



## repayment advice

Our debt team provides one-to-one consultations in order to tailor support which enables people to make the right choices. This includes managing finances and arranging suitable repayment methods.

### Claire's story\*

Claire sought help from Citizens Advice after fleeing domestic and financial abuse, leaving behind her mortgaged home with significant arrears and facing repossession and enforcement action. Struggling with mental health and anxiety, she needed support understanding the legal and financial implications.

We completed a debt and benefit assessment, checked her credit report, contacted creditors, and arranged Breathing Space. Claire received advice on repossession, debt types, and enforcement protocols for vulnerable people. We also provided details of domestic violence support organisations. After Claire's home was sold and the mortgage settled, we helped prepare a Debt Relief Order application, writing off £22,957.51 of debt. Claire was very grateful for the support throughout the three-year process.

**Financial  
outcome:**  
**£22,957.51**  
of debt  
written off

\*name has been changed to protect identity

"I really appreciate your guidance and support throughout and has helped massively with the stress that was looming over me."

"Having been a victim of domestic violence and fraud, left homeless and with what felt to me like a mountain of debt, I had become a shell of a person with no hope. You played an immense role in helping me get my finances back on track. I truly am so grateful for the service you gave me."

# We also provide support in other areas...

## Employment

**we helped 839 people with employment issues**

Our specialist employment advisers from the Dorset Employment Unit offer support and guidance about a range of different employment issues. This includes informing people about their rights at work and sharing advice on how to deal with employment issues such as grievances, wrongful termination, constructive dismissal, and helping to answer questions around contracts and pay. In 2024-2025, we assisted with 1,892 employment issues within Dorset.

## Energy Advice

**we gave energy advice to 1,031 people**

The Dorset energy team provides energy advice to households across Dorset. They offer energy efficiency advice, help with billing and supplier issues, meter problems and can provide free CO monitors. They also have an Energy Bus that stops at rural locations across Dorset offering free energy advice to residents.

### **Mavis' story\***

Mavis had made repeated attempts to get her broken electricity meter replaced through raising complaints with their energy supplier and the energy ombudsman over a two year period. Due to estimated bills, Mavis had built up arrears of £2,139.04 which we supported in getting written off, helping Mavis get a new meter installed, and receive a letter of apology from their supplier.

\*name has been changed to protect identity





## Macmillan Project

The Macmillan project provides those with cancer and their families support in accessing benefits to help them manage financially through difficult times. We work closely with healthcare professionals, to ensure a fair outcome in complex, health-related benefit cases.

In 2024-25 we supported **912** people through the Macmillan Project.

## Charitable Support and Foodbanks

Foodbanks provide a lifeline for many on the poverty line to access food to feed their families. Our dedicated teams provide clients access to emergency food supplies as well as access to available charitable grants including Household Support Fund.

Citizens Advice in Dorset receives a large number of enquiries from local people struggling to stay on top of household bills as the cost of living crisis continues to make life incredibly difficult.

We helped **4,219** people with food bank referrals and access to emergency charitable grants over the last financial year

# Volunteers

Volunteers are fundamental to our service and we remain grateful for their commitment to our organisation. We have over 200 volunteers who provided over 5,900 hours of voluntary work during 2024-2025.

They bring crucial support by providing information and advice direct to the person in need. This could be via weekly drop ins at various locations, helping to answer calls on Adviceline or assisting people with appointments for more complex issues.

We also have a team of trustees who give their time for free, who support and help guide our organisation. We are very grateful for their on-going commitment.

Volunteers also contribute through Research and Campaigns, identifying systemic issues and supporting our team by analysing problems to find trends and areas where local and national policies need improvement.

## Our volunteers say:

"I have had the pleasure of working as a volunteer adviser... it has been educational and motivational for me personally, it has also been a rewarding experience helping the general public... although challenges exist, especially with the more vulnerable clients, there is nothing more satisfying than a positive outcome to their worrying concerns."

"I retired in 2025 but wanted to keep mentally active and do something to support the local community. I now help local people with issues they may have in many aspects of life from my area of employment to benefits, personal disputes, financial issues. It is very rewarding and I look forward to my time in the office each week. Citizens Advice offers a valuable service to the community and I see people from a wide spectrum of that community."

"With some spare time on my hands I was looking to do some voluntary work that would exercise my brain and possibly help people. I get a sense of satisfaction helping people deal with, and hopefully resolve, everyday issues such as relationships, benefits, finance, housing etc. Every day is different and there is satisfaction in dealing with some of the challenges presented."



# Thank you to our supporters

## **Councils**

Dorset Council and all supporting Parish and Town Councils across the Dorset Council area

## **Project-funding**

Access to Justice Foundation  
Alice Ellen Cooper Dean Charitable Foundation  
Bournemouth Water  
Dorset Community Foundation  
Henry Smith Foundation  
Macmillan Cancer Care  
Mencap  
Money Advice Service  
National Lottery  
Nationwide  
NHS  
Southern Gas Network  
Talbot Village Trust  
The Energy Saving Trust  
The Trussell Trust  
Valentine Trust  
Wessex Water  
West Dorset Mencap

**citizens  
advice**

**Dorset**

## **Special Thanks**

to the many individuals, businesses and donors who have supported us in different ways by donating their time, resources and expertise.

# **Contact us**

**[www.citizensadvisedorset.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvisedorset.org.uk)**

**Bridport and District:** [www.bridportca.org.uk](http://www.bridportca.org.uk)

**Central Dorset:** [www.centraldorsetca.org.uk](http://www.centraldorsetca.org.uk)

**East Dorset and Purbeck:** [www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk)

Dorset Adviceline freephone **0800 144 8848**  
textphone **0800 144 8884**, Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm



**@CitAdviceEDP | @citizens-advice-bridport-district**



**@CitAdviceDorset | @BridportCAB |  
@WPCAB | @WestDorsetCAB | @CitAdviceEDP**