



The Citizens Advice service began in the UK in September 1939 as a war-time service and has continued to provide free, impartial, independent and confidential advice to anyone who needs help, ever since then. The Felixstowe & District Citizens Advice Bureau commenced in operation as a stand-alone service in 1984 and has been supporting people in and around the Felixstowe area from that date forward. Following a national re-branding exercise in 2016 the term 'Bureau' was dropped from the title and **Citizens Advice – Felixstowe** continues to provide face-to-face and telephone advice from its main office in Orwell Road as well as outreach locations at Felixstowe Library, two doctors surgeries and both Hollesley Bay and Warren Hill prisons.

There are currently just under 300 local Citizens Advice offices across the country, all working beneath the national umbrella Citizens Advice organisation. Each local office is a registered charity in its own right and is responsible for its own fundraising in order to maintain its presence and support local people. There is no central funding received locally from the national organisation and indeed, each local office has to pay a membership fee to the centre in order to maintain its membership of the service and continue to use the Citizens Advice brand.

And of course, with that trusted brand comes many years of support and service and an extremely good reputation both locally and nationally for providing high quality advice to anyone who needs our help. As far as we are aware, Citizens Advice are the only advice provider in the UK who quality assures the advice it delivers to its clients with as many as four different levels of scrutiny to be passed before we are satisfied that the information and support given to the customer is correct and accurate. Our organisation has a robust infrastructure behind it which ensure we have access to the most up-to-date information available at our fingertips.

We are proud to be able to be that first point of call for anyone who has a concern of any sort – whatever the issue may be. We have a dedicated Money Advice Team here in Felixstowe who can help with any debt or financial issues and we also have a dedicated Financial Capability worker who can work with people who, whilst not currently in debt, can foresee issues arising in the future and need to look at their options. We will work with the customer and help them prepare a budget, looking at their income and expenditure and will also look at negotiating with potential creditors in order to enable them to manage their finances better.

Our trained benefits advisers can help those who are currently in receipt of welfare benefits or who are looking to make a claim for the first time and our team of highly trained, dedicated volunteer advisers will help anyone who contacts us looking for help on a range of issues such as housing, relationships, employment, tax, consumer issues etc. – as well as those money and benefits issues mentioned earlier.

Whilst we do not claim to be the 'experts' in every subject – if we don't know the answer to a question, we probably know someone who does! We work very closely with other local charities and organisations who specialise in specific areas of advice and help and we also have good links with our local solicitors and can refer those people whose issues are very complex and perhaps need the trained legal eye to look over the situation in more detail.

We work in close partnership with the town council, the district council and the county council too, in order that we can access support from the appropriate specialist teams who can help with specific housing and council tax issues and we have an excellent relationship with the local provider of social housing within the Suffolk Coastal area.

We are also working in close partnership with Suffolk Coastal District Council and the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to prepare for the launch of Universal Credit in our area. We know from experience elsewhere in the country that the transition to Universal credit for some people is causing major problems – especially around budgeting and the use of digital services. A claim to Universal Credit has to be made and maintained online which requires the claimant to have access to a computer, tablet or mobile phone which has access to the internet. There is also a minimum five week waiting period from the date a successful claim is made to the first payment of benefit being received and this is causing all sorts of problems with budgeting and associated issues around such things as housing and paying rent etc. Some areas around Felixstowe went live on Universal Credit in April with the remainder – including Felixstowe itself, due to go-live in October of this year. With our links to the DWP, the housing teams at the district council and our knowledge and experience in helping people budget, we will be best placed to help anyone who is struggling with the Universal Credit claim itself or with the associated problems that this brings.

**So in a nutshell – whoever you are – whatever your problem, think Citizens Advice!**

Here are some key statistics from the work we undertook during the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018:

Clients helped in Felixstowe in 2017-18

IN THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2018, WE SAW

**2053** INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS!

We helped those 2053 individuals with

**6042** DIFFERENT ISSUES!

We secured financial outcomes for those individuals of

**£298,373!**

Pensionwise Appointments  
Delivered

**138**

2017/18 Client Issues

