



2018/19 has been a challenging year for Citizens Advice in Felixstowe following the announcement by the County Council that they planned to reduce our grant funding – initially by 100% from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – later reduced to 50% following a major campaign, but with the clear message that funding will be reduced completely by the end of 2019/20.

As a result we have been working hard to try and secure other sources of funding to enable us to provide the services that we currently do to those who turn to us for help. And in these continuing times of austerity, securing grant funding is becoming ever more difficult.

And so we were extremely grateful to Felixstowe Town Council – not only for providing us with a grant (as they generously do each year) to help cover our core costs – that is expenses like rent, heat, light etc. but also later in the year we applied for some additional funding in order to update our IT capability at our outreach locations around the Felixstowe area and we were very grateful to be granted an additional £2000 to enable us to purchase new laptop computers. We are ever more reliant on adequate IT provision when we work off site as all our case recording and advice information is stored online. Therefore, in order to provide a comprehensive service at our outreach locations, reliable IT equipment is a must!

We currently provide our outreach services in two Felixstowe GP surgeries, a Woodbridge GP surgery, the Felixstowe Library, and the Felixstowe Job Centre. In addition we also provide outreach support at HM Prisons at Hollesley and Warren Hill. These additional locations allow clients who for whatever reason are unable to get to us in Felixstowe, to access advice at other, more easily accessible venues that suit their particular circumstances. During 2018/19 we saw 209 individuals at these venues (often more than once – although they are only counted once for statistical purposes) and together those clients brought with them 467 different issues.

We have also been heavily involved in the local roll-out of Universal Credit within the Felixstowe area. Alongside our partners at the DWP, the local District Council and fellow support agencies we have been working to make the transition to Universal Credit as easy as possible for those now having to claim this benefit. This benefit has to be claimed online – which means that claimants have to have access to the internet and to a mobile device or computer of some sort in order to make and maintain their claim. Only in very exceptional circumstances can a claim be made over the telephone. We are acutely aware that for a number of different reasons not everyone has access to the digital world and so making a claim to a new benefit – and having to do that online – is for some, quite a challenge. We now have public access computers available in our office so that people can use the internet to make and maintain their benefit claims and we also have a range of other IT equipment including a tablet, to show people how to make a claim. Universal Credit is designed to run most effectively on a mobile phone or a tablet such as an I-pad and showing people what to do on a normal stand-alone computer is quite alien to some! So we have had to move with the times and get some more up-to-date IT equipment in order that we can support our clients in using the most appropriate types of equipment. But all of this comes at a cost! From April 2019 Citizens Advice is providing the official 'Help to Claim' service for Universal Credit on behalf of the DWP across the UK and we expect to see a significant rise in the number of people accessing our services in order to make their claims.

The Citizens Advice service remains the prime advice agency throughout the country – delivering advice from nearly 300 different main locations and an additional 3500+ outreach locations – providing free, confidential, Impartial, Independent and quality assured advice to anybody who needs our help.

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 National umbrella organisation 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.

Here are some key statistics from the work we undertook in Felixstowe during the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019:

Clients helped in Felixstowe in 2018-19

IN THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2019, WE SAW

**2164** INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS!

We helped those 2164 individuals with

**7689** DIFFERENT ISSUES!

We secured financial outcomes for those individuals of

**£494,778!**

Pensionwise Appointments  
Delivered

**181**