

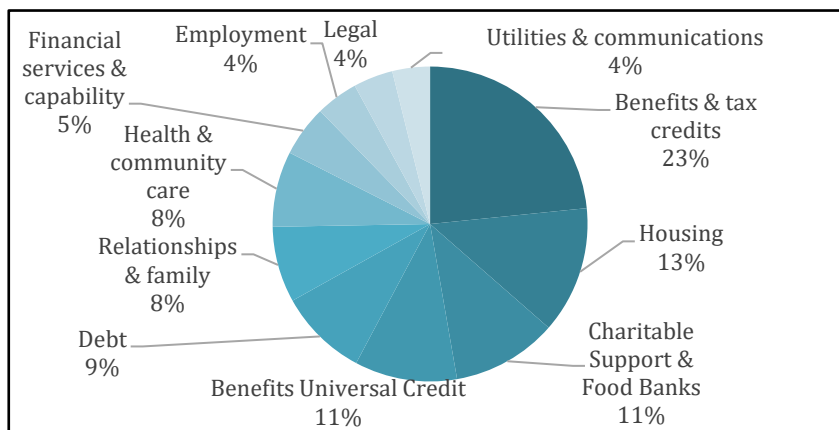
Citizens Advice East Suffolk Quarterly Report 31/3/2023

The financial year 2022/23 has been a busy and exciting year for Citizens Advice East Suffolk (CAES). The company was formed on the 1st of April 2022 from the merger of Citizens Advice North East Suffolk, Citizens Advice Felixstowe and Citizens Advice Leiston.

CAES covers the whole geographical area of East Suffolk and operates from four main offices in Beccles, Felixstowe, Leiston and Lowestoft and seven outreaches in Bungay, Framlingham, Halesworth, Martlesham, Saxmundham, Wickham Market and Woodbridge. Clients can access our services by email, phone and face to face appointments. We plan to launch video link appointments shortly.

The merger has given us the opportunity to streamline our IT and phone service and to develop specialist groups which can support advisers across the district. At present we have specialisms in housing, benefits and debt and we are looking to develop these further. We have one phone line which is answered between 10 and 2 every day and one website, www.citizensadvicееastssuffolk.org.uk, providing clients with a simple means of contact us. We continue to receive a large number of phone and email queries, and in order to meet this demand we are currently offering appointments at our main offices and drop-ins at our outreaches. As we build up adviser numbers, we hope to expand the number of drop-in services we are able to offer. In the last financial year, we increased the number of clients we see face to face by 6% and we expect this growth to continue.

Across East Suffolk, the number of core funded clients we have worked with have remained the same at around 6,500, although we work with another 1,500 clients through our funded projects which cover our debt and social prescribing projects. The 3% increase in the number of clients we have supported across East Suffolk has translated into an 8% increase in the number of issues advised on, reflecting an increase in more complex cases.



Chief Executive Chiara Saunders

The chart above shows the breakdown of issues that we have advised on in 2022/3. Benefits remains an important area for advice and as does debt and we continue to hold Advice Quality Standard in casework in Debt and Welfare Benefits as well as Money and Pensions Service (MAPs) accreditation. The main growth area has been the demand for charitable support and food bank support and the need for financial capability support.

This reflects the cost-of-living crisis and the struggles that people are facing due to increased costs in their utility bills and their food bills. We are offering a service to clients to help them manage their finances as we recognise that the crisis we are currently experiencing is likely to be with us for some time and clients need to be equipped to deal this. Our services involve us ensuring the client has maximised income, has reduced expenditure as much as possible and has accessed all support available.

Housing remains an important area of advice, and the development of our housing specialism has enabled us to help clients with some complex needs. Housing stock in East Suffolk is low and tenants who rent privately are often worried about rocking the boat and making complaints about the state of their housing whilst sometimes facing large rent increases.

Our work has enabled clients to achieve outcomes in excess of £1.5 million. Clients have benefitted from our expertise in debt and benefits work and our willingness to advocate on their behalf.

Outcome	Total Value
Debt written off	£415,466
Benefit / tax credit gain - a new award or increase	£683,433
Benefit / tax credit gain - award or increase following revision or appeal	£112,425
Other (financial)	£110,967
Charitable payment	£61,056
Complaint successful	£20,962
Benefit / tax credit gain - Money put back into payment	£19,499
Other	£159,700

Almost half our clients present with a long-term health condition, and we are able to assist them in claiming the benefits they need and accessing services and support they need. In the Waveney area we provide a social prescribing service based out of GP surgeries and in the old Suffolk Coastal area we receive referrals from GP surgeries and social prescribing services who look to us to provide their clients with the support they need to be financially secure and to be able to live independently.

The merger has enabled us to provide clients across East Suffolk with a more streamlined advice service, available through a mix of channels and with access to specialist advice. Despite our larger size, we remain committed to the individual communities we cover and have worked hard to expand our outreach services with the adviser resources we have available. We also work closely with the local DWP offices, the Family Hubs and the food banks. We attend local events held for the voluntary sector or organised by schools and ensure that we have a local presence that clients can access.

If you would like any further information about our services or how we can work with you, you can contact me by email on csaunders@caes.org.uk.

Chiara Saunders
Chief Executive
Citizens Advice East Suffolk

Information on Felixstowe

In the financial year 2022/3, Felixstowe has remained an important part of the CAES network. The office is open 5 days a week and clients can visit us between 10 and 1.30 each day. Appointments are organised for face-to-face meetings and clients can also ring and email for advice.

Over the year CAES dealt with 714 clients based in Felixstowe, an increase of 23% on the previous financial year. 18% of clients were seen face to face, up from 7% in the previous year. These figures represent clients based in Felixstowe alone, however the office works with the wider area around Felixstowe and the total number of clients supported by the Felixstowe office in 2022/3 amounted to over 2,700 with outcomes of over £380,000.

The demand for advice in Felixstowe reflects the same range as that seen across CAES, with benefits, debt, housing, family and employment continuing to be important areas of advice and a growth in demand for charitable support and foodbanks.

The Felixstowe office will be working with the local DWP office and the local Family Hub and we are discussing whether an outreach service would be beneficial for the community. We have attended local Ease the Squeeze events run by East Suffolk Council and attended events organised by local schools. Further events will be supported and the office remains embedded in the local community and knowledgeable about the services and support available locally.