

# Citizens Advice Hertfordshire

April to June 2020

Welcome to our July newsletter! The Citizens Advice Hertfordshire newsletter provides useful updates on our county-wide projects. Thank you to all our funders, partners and stakeholders for their investment in and support for our work ; this partnership work is vital for the 1.2 million residents of Hertfordshire, any of whom could one day need our help,

## COVID-19 - Operational Updates

Citizens Advice Hertfordshire responded to the rapid changes brought about by COVID-19 and by March 23<sup>rd</sup> had closed all our face-to-face services across the county to protect our clients and team. Despite the closure of our most popular advice channel, we worked hard to make sure we continued to be there to help the community. Our staff and volunteers transitioned immediately to provide advice remotely from home, and many of our volunteers are donating more hours than before. Their commitment to our community is inspiring and means that we can continue to support those who need specialist advice at a time when many people are in challenging circumstances.

We are as committed as ever to providing our service to the residents of Hertfordshire during this period of uncertainty. Residents can expect the same level of service and assistance as they received prior to lockdown, with enhancements in other service such as email and web chat. Offices across Hertfordshire are planning to offer video appointments shortly.

The year ahead is likely to be difficult. We know demand for our service will increase and we know we need to ensure our new operating model is sustainable long term. Nevertheless, we are facing the challenges head on and are putting our beneficiaries at the heart of every decision we make.



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## Crisis Intervention – Q1 Performance

Life is becoming more complicated. The last 3 months have been difficult for people in a way that no one could have anticipated but our service has continued to adapt to meet the needs of our community at a time when it is needed more than ever. All offices across the county have adapted delivery models and have continued to offer advice to all residents.

This is a summary of Crisis Intervention achievements for the last 3 months. Citizens Advice offices across Hertfordshire are here for everyone, whenever they need us. Over 100 volunteers are delivering advice remotely and our specialists are carrying out telephone appointments.

We are working more closely with partners to identify and address emerging issues across the county.

**1,001**

Unique clients

**1,255**

Overall clients

**£418,989**

In financial gains

### People helped with Crisis Intervention

926 unique clients  
1,120 overall clients

### Financial gains

£206,150

### People helped with Welfare Benefit Appeals

48 unique clients  
90 overall clients

### Financial gains

£109,785

### People helped in crisis via British Sign Language

27 unique clients  
45 overall clients

### Financial gains

£103,054

**75%**

Of clients were able to access advice that suited their needs

**72%**

of clients were financially better off as a result of our advice, information and support

**78%**

of clients said that their wellbeing improved as a result of our advice, information and support

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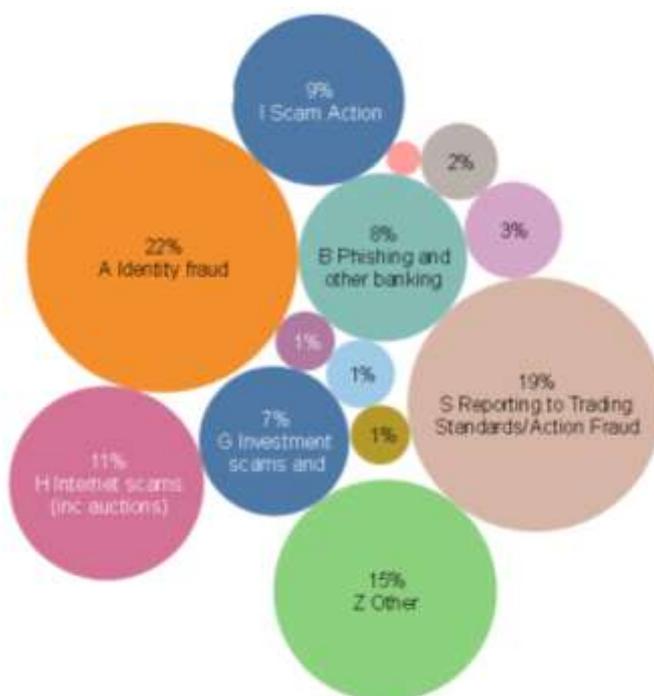
## Scams Awareness – 12 months on

The Scams Support and Prevention service has now been running for 12 months and is effectively supporting Hertfordshire residents. As the three main points of contact for the project, Stevenage, Watford and Three Rivers Citizens Advice have been working closely together to develop a consistent approach to scams advice and support across the county. Each of the 10 local offices across Hertfordshire has taken a proactive approach to providing information to all clients on a number of fraud/scam related issues.

|                                  |       |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| <b>People Helped</b>             | 5,392 |
| <b>Events across the county</b>  | 20    |
| <b>Frontline workers trained</b> | 342   |

The graph above demonstrates the types of issues we have supported residents of Hertfordshire with over the last 12 months. Every consumer has different experiences and stories to share, which is why we record each of their issues in our case management system to track trends and identify any recurring issues. The top scams related issues people contact us about are identity fraud and support with reporting to Trading Standards and Action Fraud. Our clients tell us they do not feel confident in reporting their issues on their own.

Our annual Scams Awareness campaign aims to create a network of confident and alert consumers who know what to do when they spot a scam. This year's campaign focused on raising awareness of the scams that have emerged as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. This year, protecting people against scams is more important than ever. The Coronavirus crisis means that more people are in more vulnerable situations and therefore may be more likely to fall victim to a scam.



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## GambleAware Project

Citizens Advice has been commissioned by GambleAware, an independent charity tasked to fund research, education and treatment services to help reduce gambling-related harm, to deliver Gambling Support Services. For Hertfordshire this is coordinated by one office who provide education and training to organisations with frontline workers to help them spot the signs, prevent and minimise Gambling Related Harms (GRH). We also attend local and national events to raise awareness of GRH and the services that are available to those affected.

Our project worker has continued to provide advice and support via digital means for our clients during the COVID-19 pandemic and offers online training to frontline workers.

If you don't know what Gambling Related Harms are why not attend one of our training sessions? [Click here to sign up now.](#)

## British Sign Language (BSL) project

Citizens Advice champions equality and this includes equal access to services, Redmond Kaye, our adviser who is deaf himself and whose first language is British Sign Language, offers county-wide support to clients in Hertfordshire who communicate using British Sign Language (BSL), Sign Supported Language (SSE), or lip-speaking.

To contact the Deaf Advice Service, text 07756 148591 (standard network rates apply) or email [bsl@whcab.org.uk](mailto:bsl@whcab.org.uk)

## Welfare Benefit Appeals project

Our Welfare Benefit Appeals project supports, advocates and represents clients at tribunals, when their benefits have been turned down. The appeals caseload is intensive, and requires in depth understanding of welfare benefit rules and regulations. Our caseworker prepares detailed appeal submissions on behalf of clients and continues to support at tribunal where possible. 90% of appeals prepared by our caseworker are successful, compared with the national average of 64%.

To contact the Welfare Benefit Appeals service, email [appeals@castevenage.org.uk](mailto:appeals@castevenage.org.uk)