

Impact Report: April – September 2016

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This report gives a 6 month summary of the work of the Citizens Advice service across Dorset: through the consortium ‘Citizens Advice in Dorset’, our seven local offices, and our specific projects. It also reviews work to date on the Advice Partnership and meeting Dorset County Council outcomes by working with POPPs and other voluntary sector agencies. The Appendix is a statistical report on advice delivered and client demographics over the period; this is a separate document.

1. What is Citizens Advice in Dorset?

Citizens Advice in Dorset [‘CAiD’] is a consortium of the nine Citizens Advice offices based in Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole. CAiD’s aim is to ensure that the people of Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole have access to the best possible advice services by promoting the work of the Citizens Advice service, and by supporting the development and growth of advice services.

CAiD is a voice for the CAB service
CAiD actively seeks funding for the network
CAiD aims to achieve more efficient working across the local offices
CAiD works with our offices and other partners to develop services for the benefit of our clients
CAiD keeps up to date with the external environment and develops relationships with funders

2. Supporting the Advice Sector

CAiD works closely with the nine local Citizens Advice offices, facilitating communication, supporting and managing the delivery of joint projects such as Healthwatch, providing training, and taking forward work on a range of initiatives.

CAiD supports the wider advice sector through the Advice Partnership (see below), the Advice Dorset Network membership scheme, and through our work with Dorset Race Equality Council.

CAiD also works with statutory partners - local authorities, the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Department for Work and Pensions, and other pan-Dorset providers - to communicate about the impact of our work, ensure our clients’ voices are heard, and to contribute to joint work and initiatives.

In the period April to September 2016 we have:

- Developed an Advice Partnership (see 3 below)
- Supported 6 Local Advice Networks to meet
- Provided support to over 40 organisations through the Advice Dorset Network, including:
 - Fortnightly information updates via an ebulletin
 - Conference in October: *Dorset for all Advice and Support for People Facing Discrimination* (40 attendees from a range of voluntary and statutory organisations)
 - 2 Welfare Benefits Forums with input from key staff from the Department for Work and Pensions and Westway Partnership
 - A programme of training courses for the wider advice sector on a range of subjects (Immigration, SMART meters, Personal Independence Payment)
- Produced a report on Emergency Local Assistance, shared with DCC commissioners
- Supported the production of an Energy Referral Toolkit and a report on rural energy issues
- Attended the Early Help Board and contributed to the Prevention at Scale agenda.
- Attended and fed into a DCC session on the consultation process for Fairer Charging
- Worked with the POPPs teams to ensure information is available on services (see 4 below)

What are the results of this activity?

- ✓ The advice sector is better informed and kept updated
- ✓ Staff are trained to provide more specialist advice
- ✓ Links are made between organisations to improve referrals and avoid duplication
- ✓ Action is taken on issues of common concern
- ✓ Intelligence – data and case studies - is shared with statutory partners.
- ✓ Feedback is given to statutory partners on how their decisions affect Dorset residents

How do these activities relate to DCC's 'SHIP' Outcomes?

A robust advice sector means people can access the support they need before situations reach crisis point and require costly statutory interventions. Access to high quality advice in a range of formats ensures Dorset residents know their rights and responsibilities and can take action to solve problems and improve their situations.

This results in people being **safer, healthier**, and able to access the support they need to maintain **independence**. Financial gains, either from welfare benefits claimed or debts written off, takes people out of poverty so they become - relatively - more **prosperous**.

3. Dorset Advice Partnership

In 2015 Dorset County Council commissioned CAiD to produce an Advice Strategy, which reviewed advice provision and advice needs across the pan-Dorset area. Increasing demand for advice (particularly with the on-going welfare reform agenda) coupled with reduced public funding for advice services were identified as key factors, alongside a tendency for advice services to be fragmented and for people to experience the 'revolving door' syndrome of having to tell their story to a number of different agencies. To mitigate these factors advice organisations need to be able to work more collaboratively, and provide early interventions to prevent situations reaching crisis point. There also needs to be adequate investment to ensure there is an robust, effective and independent advice sector.

A key recommendation of the Strategy was that Dorset County Council should support the development of an **Advice Partnership**, and identify a **lead agency** to take on a co-ordinating role designed to ensure smarter working and better collaboration across the sector. Dorset County Council's support to the Voluntary and Community Sector for 2016/17 provides CAiD with a Strategic Grant which includes leading on the development of an Advice Partnership, as well as supporting advice delivery via the local offices and ensuring those with protected characteristics get the advice they need from Dorset Race Equality Council.

So far CAiD has engaged with over 40 organisations; staff from 12 of these have formed a Steering Group. Initial work has focussed on:

- Improving referral processes between agencies
- Funding - opportunities
- Practical support: sharing information and tips
- Demonstrating the impact and the value of the advice sector – a report on this will be presented to DCC in January 2017

The full Advice Strategy can be found at:

<https://citizensadvisedorset.org.uk/about-us/news/>

4. Joint Pilot Outcomes: working with POPPs

For 2016/17 DCC also commissioned CAiD to deliver on pilot outcomes to show how the voluntary sector can support DCC initiatives; our task is to focus on a 'high visibility service' and show where the voluntary sector can add value. This also involves working with colleagues at Dorset Community Action and the Volunteer Centre Dorset.

CAiD is supporting the work of the POPS Project; work so far has been as follows:

Activity	Outcomes
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Acting as a liaison between POPPs and the Local Citizens Advice offices to ensure our teams attend Falls Prevention Events. These ensure both other agencies and members of the public are aware of Citizens Advice services. To date we understand around 1000 residents have attended these events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SHIP outcomes for residents ▪ Improved collaboration, signposting and referral
Briefing Wayfinders at the POPPs re-launch, with a particular focus on the advice needs of the 18 – 49 age group (now included in the POPPs remit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SHIP outcomes for residents through improved collaboration, signposting and referral
One-to-one support to POPPs team members on specific topics, such as counteracting loneliness and isolation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SHIP outcomes for residents through improved understanding of services
Updating the welfare benefits text for the MyLifeMy Care website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to up-to-date and clear information contributes to the Independent outcome
Inviting Sue Warr (POPPs Programme Manager) to join the Advice Partnership Steering Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bringing two important 'networks' together – POPPs and CAiD - leads to more effective service delivery

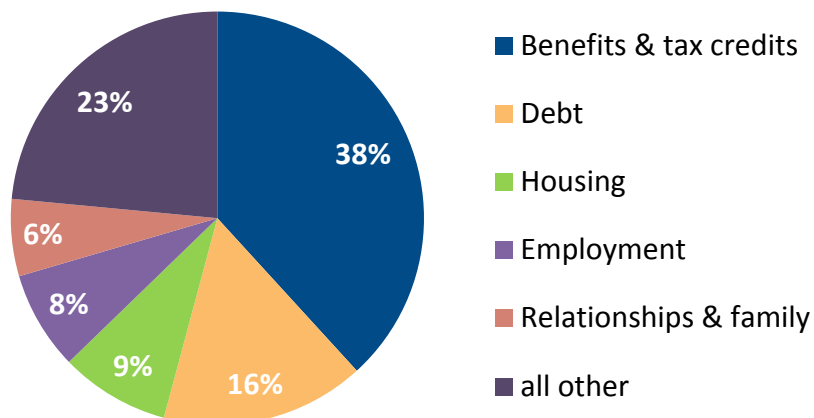
The key learning from this joint work is that DCC and the voluntary sector share many of the same outcomes; collaboration is crucial so that learning and support can be shared across the sectors, leading to more effective and efficient service delivery. End result: better outcomes for Dorset residents.

5. The work of our 7 Local Citizens Advice Offices

Key data on advice and client demographics is in Appendix 1: the following is a summary from the 'Dashboard'

In the period April to September 2016:

- We helped **9,281** people
- They had **21,972** issues
- Income gained (mainly from successful benefit claims): **£4,705,811**
- **42%** of our clients had a **disability or long-term health condition**
- Of a total of **13,897 contacts with clients**, **8,311** were face-to-face, **2,417** contacts came through our central 'advice line' number
- 1 in 5 clients were helped at the **casework** level - often involving work over a long period, dealing with third parties, to resolve complex and multiple issues
- The main advice areas are shown below:



Case Studies: Two cases studies illustrate the very real impact our advice series have on people’s lives:

The problem	The Solution	Outcomes
Client with severe mental health issues unable to manage everyday activities or engage with people effectively. Had been using credit card to pay for basics and had rent and council tax arrears	Client was helped to claim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment & Support Allowance – including the adviser attending the medical assessment with him. • Housing Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Reduction. • Personal Independence Payment. 	<p>Safe/Healthy: less risk of self-harm, more able to eat properly and keep warm. <i>QUOTE: I did not realise just how much financial worries were affecting my mental well being, since I have received those letters I feel like for the first time in a long time that I don't want to kill myself.</i></p> <p>Independent: able to maintain accommodation.</p> <p>Prosperous: Over £200/wk better off due to benefits awarded.</p>
Elderly client struggling to pay high gas bill. Electricity on key meter – client standing on chair to read. Heating and insulation poor. Weekly taxi to town to draw out cash and top up key meters. Living on low income	A range of interactions initiated and co-ordinated by the CAB adviser: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utility companies contacted and changed meters to credit meters, relocated to safer position. • Direct debt set up to pay bills. • Client put on Priority Services Register. • Attendance Allowance claimed –client £2,000 pa better off. • Wessex Energy Advice contacted and fitted cavity wall insulation. 	<p>Safe: Client will be warmer and no longer standing on chair to read meters.</p> <p>Healthy: likely to be healthier if warmer. NHS estimates keeping people warm saves them £861 per person.</p> <p>Independent: Able to continue living at home. Less risk of emergency admission to hospital or care.</p> <p>Prosperous: Client will be financially better off. Client will save £161 on next year’s fuel bills due to insulating home.</p>

6. Our Projects

Healthwatch Dorset: Working with Help and Care and Dorset Race Equality Council we are providing information and advice on health and social care issues through our local Citizens Advice offices as part of Healthwatch Dorset. In this period we dealt with 713 issues from 435 clients; these are issues which challenge, perplex and worry people: complex form filling, untangling an NHS penalty charge, worries about using up capital, understanding the distinction between continuing care and personal care, trying to find out about hospital travel – problems they are often trying to resolve at a time when they or their relatives are in poor health or anxious about future care options.


Advice services in Children’s Centres: Funding from Dorset County Council supports advisers in six local Citizens Advice offices to work in their local Children’s Centre one day a week. In this 6 month period we helped 118 new clients, and dealt with 270 advice issues, half of which were about benefits, debt and money advice. Other significant enquiry areas include maternity rights, especially on returning to work, and finding affordable childcare. We gained £136,396 in benefits for families. Liaison between adviser and Children’s Centre staff make this a very good example of effective partnership work.

Energy Projects:

CAiD is involved with a number of projects aimed at helping people who live in ‘fuel poverty’. Three factors contribute to fuel poverty: living on a low income, the high cost of energy, and poor quality housing. Projects include:

British Gas Energy Trust ‘Healthy Homes Project’: We are a partner in a project led by Dorset Community Action which is tackling fuel poverty through advice and other measures such as access to low-cost loans and installing wood-burning stoves. Our role is benefits and income maximisation advice. Other partners include Age UK Dorchester, Magna Housing Association, the Dorset Area of Outstanding natural Beauty, Wyvern Savings and Loans, and Dorset Mental Health Forum

Working with Purbeck CA to support the **Energy Champion** project. This has included joining the Domestic Sustainable Energy Working Group and running a Rural Energy project, funded by the national Making Energy Better campaign. This enabled us to develop an *Energy Referral Pathway and Toolkit* and a report *Making Energy Better – an investigation into the energy challenges faced by rural communities in Dorset*. Both of these are available on www.advisedorset.org.uk

	<p>The nine member Citizens Advice offices are: Bridport, Bournemouth, Christchurch, Dorchester & Sherborne, East Dorset, North Dorset, Poole, Purbeck CAB, Weymouth & Portland</p> <p>Dorset AdviceLine 0344 245 1291 or 03444 111 444 www.citizensadvisedorsetorg.uk</p> <p>Contact: caroline@caidorset.org.uk</p>
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Citizens Advice in Dorset: Reg Charity No:1130056 Company No: 6778548

CMB: Nov 2016

APPENDIX 1: Summary ‘dashboard’ client and advice statistics, April – September 2016

This data shows the activity of the 7 Local Citizens Advice offices in the county of Dorset.

