

Citizens Advice Cost of Living funding from Dorset Council

End of Grant Report: April 1 2025 to March 31 2026

Over the past year, Citizens Advice has been at the front line in delivering a targeted response to the problems faced by our residents. Our team of volunteers and paid staff have helped local people deal with the challenges as identified by them and worked with them to find real solutions. Our range of locations and channels of advice has delivered an accessible service where it is needed most. We remain that trusted brand whereby residents in need come to us first for help. Our focus has been on providing specialist support with energy-related issues, helping individuals manage rising bills, access energy-saving solutions, and secure relevant government assistance. In addition, we have offered tailored advice on maximising income, finding debt solutions, and improving financial resilience, ensuring that individuals and families are supported in managing the financial pressures they face. This funding has allowed us to increase our capacity whilst maintaining the maximum support for residents.

Key statistics: in 2025/2026 our Cost of Living caseworkers helped a total of **1,001 clients** deal with **2,799 issues** and achieved **income gains of £443,033. Total financial outcomes were £1,365,180***.

Dorset Energy Unit

The 2 full-time equivalent (FTE) Energy Unit caseworkers have continued supporting residents across the Dorset Council area with a range of energy-related issues. They have helped off-grid clients overcome challenges by advising on cost-effective heating solutions, applying for government support, and ensuring they are prepared for a warm and affordable winter. In addition, they have assisted with broader energy supply problems, liaising with suppliers to resolve issues like outages, incorrect billing, and supply interruptions, ensuring

a reliable energy supply for all residents. In addition, we help to maximise income through benefits checks and to help clients manage debt and are successful in writing debt off, where possible.

The caseworkers have also provided specialist support to improve energy efficiency in homes. This includes advising on reducing energy consumption, optimising heating systems, installing energy-saving appliances, and accessing grants for home improvements. Through this tailored guidance, our caseworkers help clients lower energy bills, reduce their carbon footprint, and make long-term improvements to their living conditions.

Cost of Living Outreach

The 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) Cost of Living outreach caseworkers have allowed us to target advice and support to residents in the most deprived areas of Dorset. Currently, these targeted areas are North Dorset and Bridport and District. They focus on those most at risk of financial hardship, offering a vital lifeline during difficult times. A key part of their service is the home visit programme, which ensures vulnerable residents—such as the elderly, those with disabilities, or people with limited mobility—receive the support they need in the comfort of their own homes. This personal approach allows residents to discuss sensitive financial matters in a confidential, supportive environment. Caseworkers also undertake outreach working at community locations such as Family Hubs and Foodbanks to ensure advice is accessible to those in need.

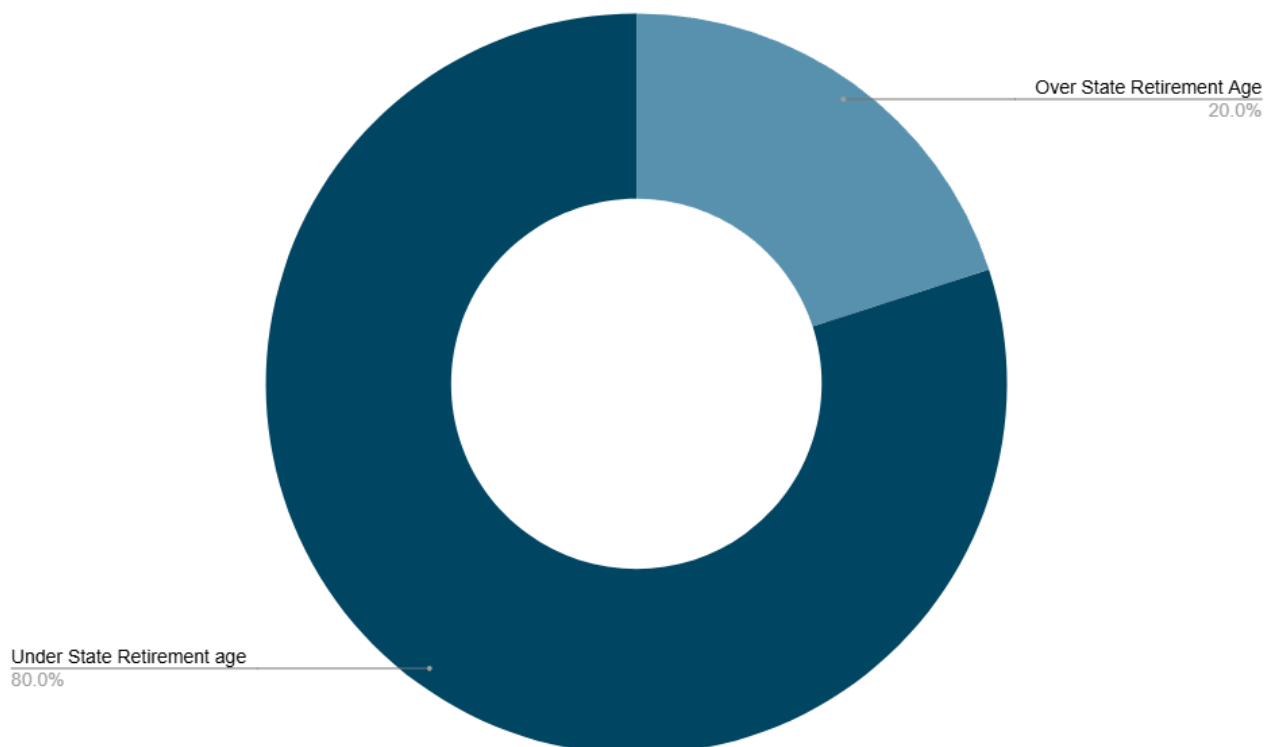
The caseworkers help maximise residents' income by guiding them through the process of claiming welfare benefits, including Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment, and offering advice on challenging benefit decisions. They also support individuals dealing with debt by negotiating with creditors, setting up payment plans, and referring clients to our specialist debt advice service. By addressing both immediate financial concerns and promoting long-term financial resilience, the caseworkers help residents regain control of their finances, reduce anxiety, and improve their overall quality of life.

Advice Session Supervisors

The funding for increased advice session supervisor support has been instrumental in supporting our volunteers, enabling them to continue delivering vital services to residents. Our volunteers remain at the centre of our delivery model and they come from our community which gives them extra insight when helping others. With the supervisors' guidance, our volunteers are equipped to provide high-quality, timely advice, ensuring that local residents receive the support they need to navigate various challenges. This funding not only sustains the volunteers' efforts but also helps maintain the smooth running of our advice services, making a real difference in the community. This extra support covers every Dorset Council ward as it helps delivery of our core service.

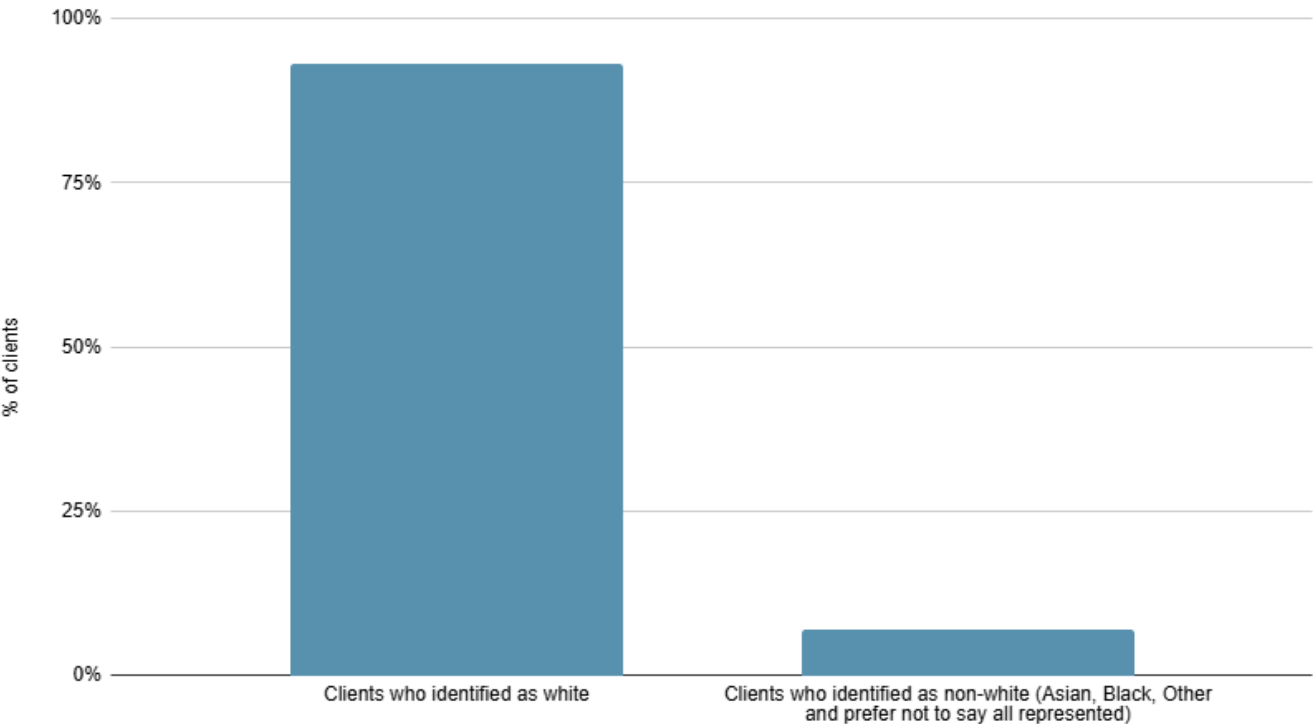
This funding supports our **219 volunteers**, the funding has assisted us to recruit and train an **additional 35 volunteers** into the service. By funding 60 hours per week of supervision, this has supported an additional **9,600 hours of advice volunteering** over the year.

Demographics

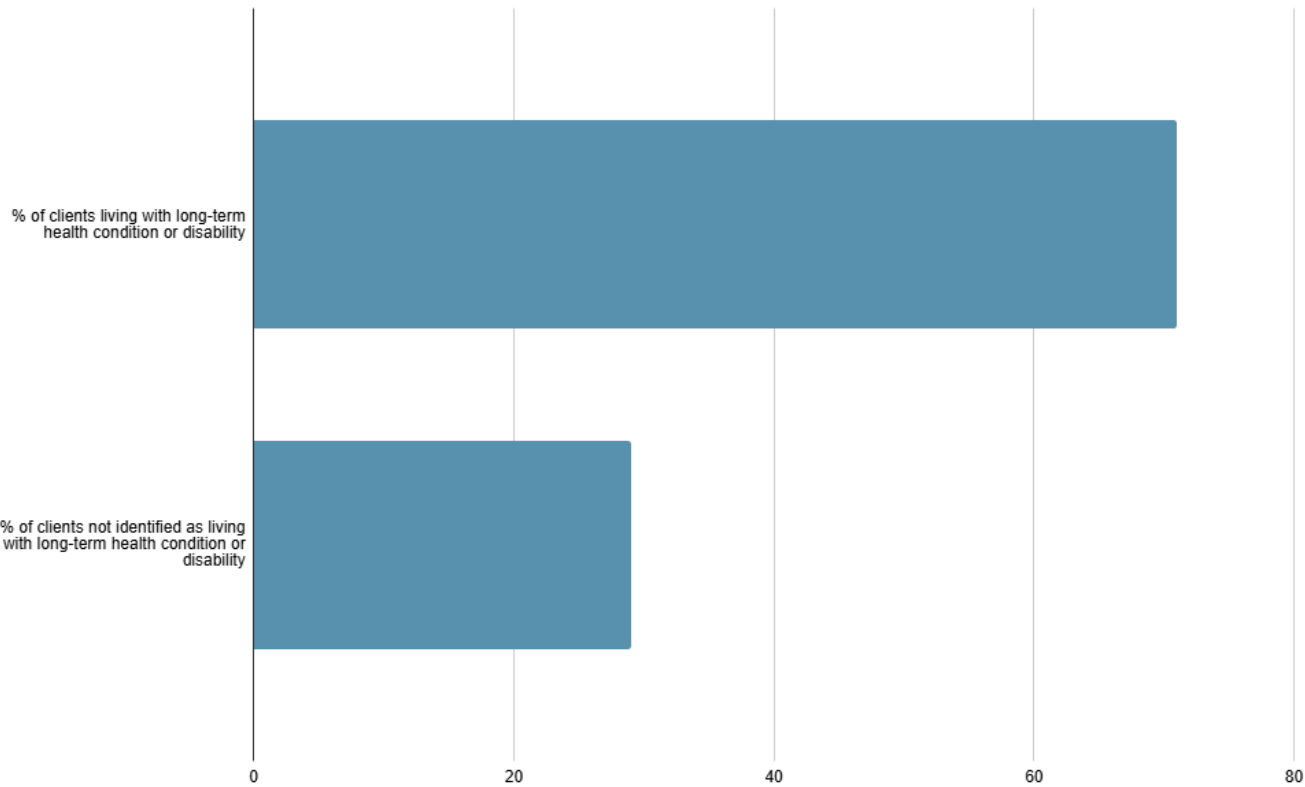


The chart above shows the percentage of clients over state-pension age that we supported.

Ethnicity data



The chart above shows the breakdown of our clients by ethnicity. 93% of clients identified as White.



In 2025-2026, 71% of clients were either disabled or suffering from a long-term health condition.

Where household type data was recorded, 30% had dependent children.

Outcomes*

In the past year, our dedicated caseworkers have helped increase client income by a total of **£443,033**. As well as this, staff helped clients successfully write off **£834,238** in debt. In addition, we helped with debt rescheduled, reimbursements and other income gained such as grants received. In total, we achieved **£1,365,180 in financial outcomes for residents**. Through expert guidance on claiming welfare benefits, accessing financial support, and managing debt, they have empowered individuals and families to maximise their financial resources. Additionally, our energy caseworkers have played a key role in helping clients reduce their energy costs by advising on cost-effective heating solutions, applying for government support, and advice on improving energy efficiency in homes.

Case Studies

1. Joe* is a single parent of 4 children ranging in age from a few months old to 12 years old. Joe lives in a privately rented property and is struggling to meet essential expenditure and to purchase essential items. Joe's income is Universal Credit, Disability Living Allowance for one child and Council Tax Support.

Joe was put in touch with a Cost of Living Caseworker to discuss short and long term solutions. The immediate need was for a new mattress for Joe's disabled child and a fridge freezer as theirs is broken. Long-term concerns are the cost of high heating bills in the winter.

With our support, Joe was referred to the Volunteer Centre for small energy saving devices, including heated blankets to stay warm in winter. An application to Ridgewater was completed successfully for a new fridge freezer and an application to ELA for a new mattress was also successful.

A full benefit check was conducted, confirming Joe is receiving all they are entitled to. Joe was also given advice on how to save energy around their home and on other avenues for cost of living support. The total value of the support given to Joe is £950.

2. Peter, a 67-year-old man, was referred to us by the local social prescribing team for assistance with his benefits following a hospital admission. Peter had become increasingly frail over the last 6 months and we undertook a home visit. We helped Peter claim Attendance Allowance and he was awarded the higher rate (worth £110.40 per week) after a 3 month wait. We kept in touch with Peter as he was anxious about the length of time the decision was taking and were able to assist him further with a Blue Badge application and then enquiries about the effect on his benefits if moving into a care home.

Impact: improved financial resilience (increased income worth £5741 annually), wellbeing and independence

3. John, is a single former Forces member with multiple health conditions, was living on Universal Credit in an electric-only property. He approached us after building up debt on his electricity prepayment meter and receiving gas bills for a supply he didn't have. We discussed full energy efficiency advice with John and we supported him to apply for Council Tax Support, securing £26.35 per week (£1,370 per year). Alongside this we helped John apply for the Limited Capability for Work element of Universal Credit (decision pending).

We also assisted with a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) application, resulting in an award at the enhanced rate for daily living and mobility (£187.45 per week / £9,747 per year), plus a backdated payment of £3,963.

We referred John to the Wessex Water Champion scheme; he was accepted onto Assist & Restart, reducing payments to £1 per month, with £1,586 to be written off in 2027. We also referred John to the local foodbank for immediate support. John said that the energy team and the volunteers who helped complete the benefit applications were worth their weight in gold.

***names changed to protect the client's identity.**

Client Wards

Ward	Clients
Beacon	15
Beaminster	13
Blandford	83
Blackmore Vale	29
Bransgore, Burley, Sopley & Ringwood East	1
Bridport	162
Burton & Grange	3
Chalk Valleys	2
Chesil Bank	13
Chickerell	11
Colehill & Wimborne Minster East	10
Corfe Mullen	8
Cranborne & Alderholt	6
Cranborne Chase	7
Dorchester East	1
Dorchester Poundbury	5
Dorchester West	3
Eggardon	2
Ferndown North	7
Gillingham	111
Hill Forts & Upper Tarrants	13
Littlemoor & Preston	2
Lytchett Matravers & Upton	16
Lyme & Charmouth	38
Marshwood Vale	12
Melcombe Regis	10
Not recorded/not applicable	25
Portland	4
Puddletown & Lower Winterborne	1
Radipole	1
Rodwell & Wyke	4
Shaftesbury Town	41

Sherborne Rural	1
Sherborne West	4
South East Purbeck	5
St Leonards & St Ives	7
Stalbridge & Marnhull	23
Stour & Allen Vale	7
Sturminster Newton	38
Swanage	29
Upwey & Broadwey	2
Verwood	12
Wareham	36
West Moors & Three Legged Cross	27
West Parley	14
West Purbeck	19
Westham	4
Wimborne Minster	28
Winterborne & Broadmayne	1
Winterborne North	2
Yetminster	1

Use of the grant

We can confirm that we used the total grant by 31 March 2026.