Supporting whole communities by helping people individually

Impact Report 2024-25

citizens advice Somerset

About us

Citizens Advice Somerset is an independent charity that provides free, confidential, and impartial advice for people in Somerset. And in September 2024 we celebrated our birthday - 85 years of providing life changing advice as the people's champion.

Our Vision

Everyone has somewhere trusted to turn to for help and advice.

Our 2024-25 Mission

Delivering excellence in advice services; advising, supporting and empowering people and advocating for social change.
We'll provide high quality and seamless services that meet our clients' needs enabling them to:

- act early to prevent a problem becoming a long-term issue (Early Help and Prevention)
- get help to address critical issues and crisis (Advice at Critical Times)
- tackle the underlying causes of financial distress and inequality (Tackling Disadvantage)

Our Values

We are an inclusive and person-centered organisation that is responsive to the needs of our clients, staff, volunteers, and partners. Committed to treating everyone fairly and with respect and dignity.

A word from our CEO

With the 2023 merger completely behind us our focus for April 2024 to March 2025 was on the delivery of our Business Plan objectives, all of which were focused on delivering great advice to as many people as possible.

We approached the year's work within a specific context of **people**, **place** and **partnership** - aiming to build our capacity, infrastructure and relationships to achieve our goals and lay foundations for the future.

During the year we delivered a huge range of services for individuals and communities in Somerset, helping them through difficult problems and challenging circumstances.

This would not have been possible without our tremendous team of volunteers, staff and trustees, each of whom stepped up to the demands of the year with enthusiasm and determination. Thank you.

People **Place** **Partnership**

Our people

113 volunteers gave up their time to serve their communities.

Volunteering is at the heart of what we do - we're strengthened by our volunteers who can usually be found at the front-line advising clients when they first contact us.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life, bringing with them different skills and experiences, and they choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. Our volunteers include students, people who want to get back into work after a career break, people with part-time jobs, carers, and people who've retired.

We celebrated our volunteers during **#Volunteers'Week** and we asked what motivates them, here are a few responses...

> To give something back to society; keep my brain active; and retain a sense of purpose in retirement.

> I enjoy helping the people I speak to. I have learned a lot through volunteering for Citizens Advice.

> Provides an opportunity to do something useful beyond meeting my other personal needs.

In addition to the value of their time, we know that volunteering also contributes to other outcomes such as increased employability and improved health and wellbeing. We calculate the total '**value of volunteering**' at Citizens Advice Somerset during 2024-25 to be **£1,080,000**.

67 employees (51.82 FTE) worked alongside or supported our volunteers.

Our year in numbers

20,214 clients received our help, from quick contact to full casework

- With **84,388** distinct advice issues
- We answered **10,163** Adviceline telephone calls
- We received or sent **46,757** emails to progress advice
- We made **26,764** phone calls to progress advice

21 in-person advice locations - community access points, foodbanks and hospitals

38 engagement activities such as attending community events, radio interviews and print media

24 local policy campaigns to make life better for people in Somerset

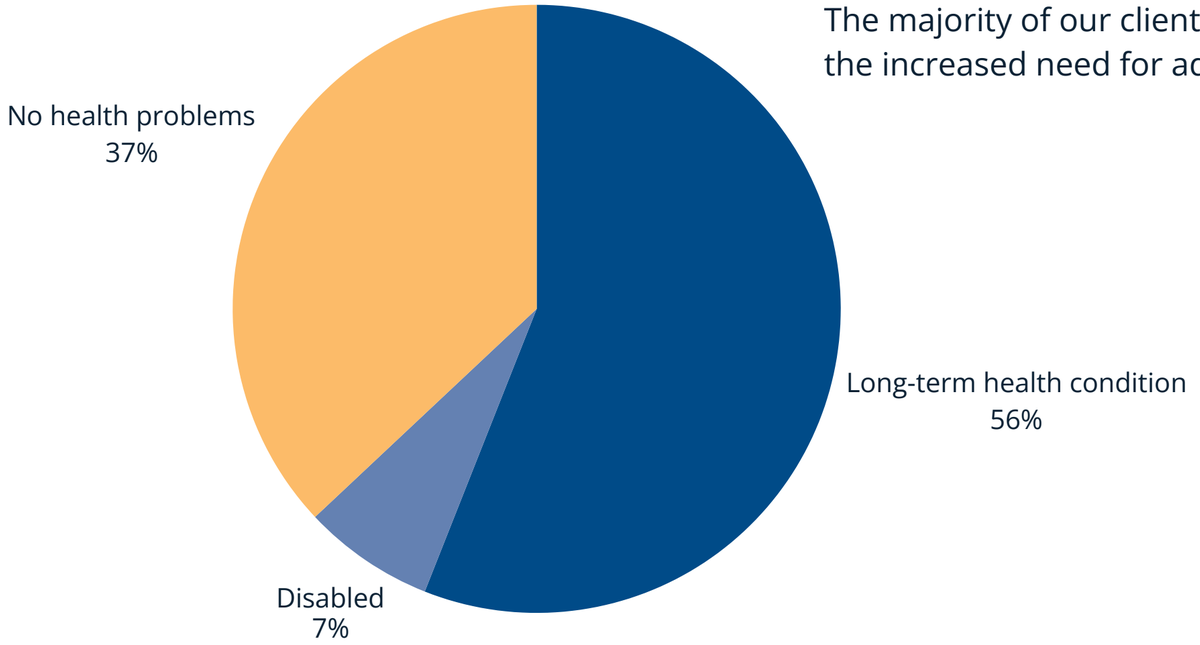
£9.39 million in increased income for clients and **£1.9** million of debt written off

Our clients

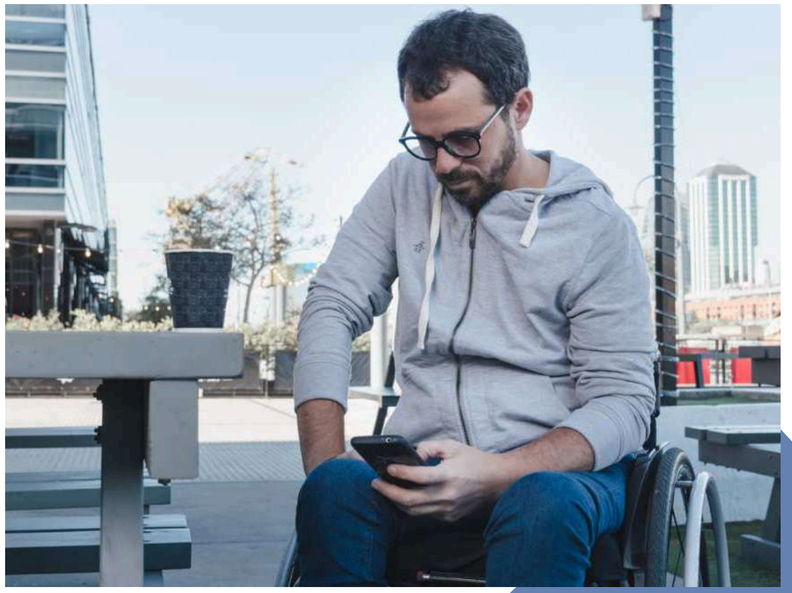
When we say we're here for everyone, we mean it. Here's an insight into our clients we helped during 2024-25.

Age is no barrier to advice, our clients ranged in age from **16** to **104 years** old.

5.6% of our clients were of Black, Asian or another ethnic minority, this is higher than for the population in Somerset as a whole.

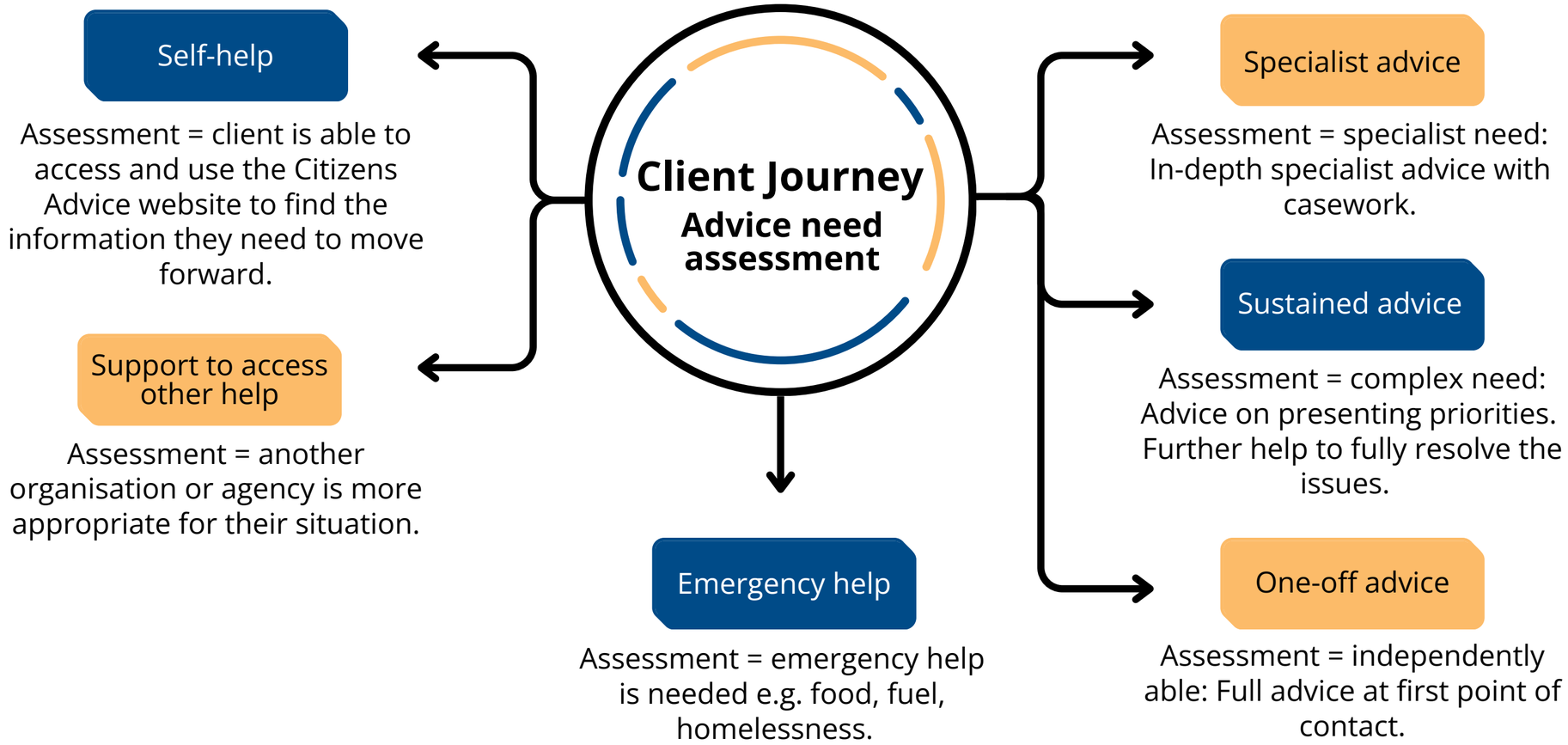


The majority of our clients were dealing with long-term ill health or disability, demonstrating the increased need for advice when you have health related difficulties.



Individualised help

During 2024-25 we refined our client journey to tailor our services to the advice needs and capabilities of each client.



Community advice services

We set out to re-model our provision and increase access to advice across all channels - phone, email and in person - and to improve our responsiveness and quality of provision.

Adviceline was available Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm and on Thursday evenings. Take up during the evening sessions was low but our phone data showed that a high number of people were trying to reach us from 9am - we revised our phone hours accordingly.

We moved into new and improved premises in Yeovil and Bridgwater, opened a new access point in Glastonbury, and re-opened in Wellington.

We simplified the referral route into our services with dedicated pathways built to meet the needs of different agencies and community groups.

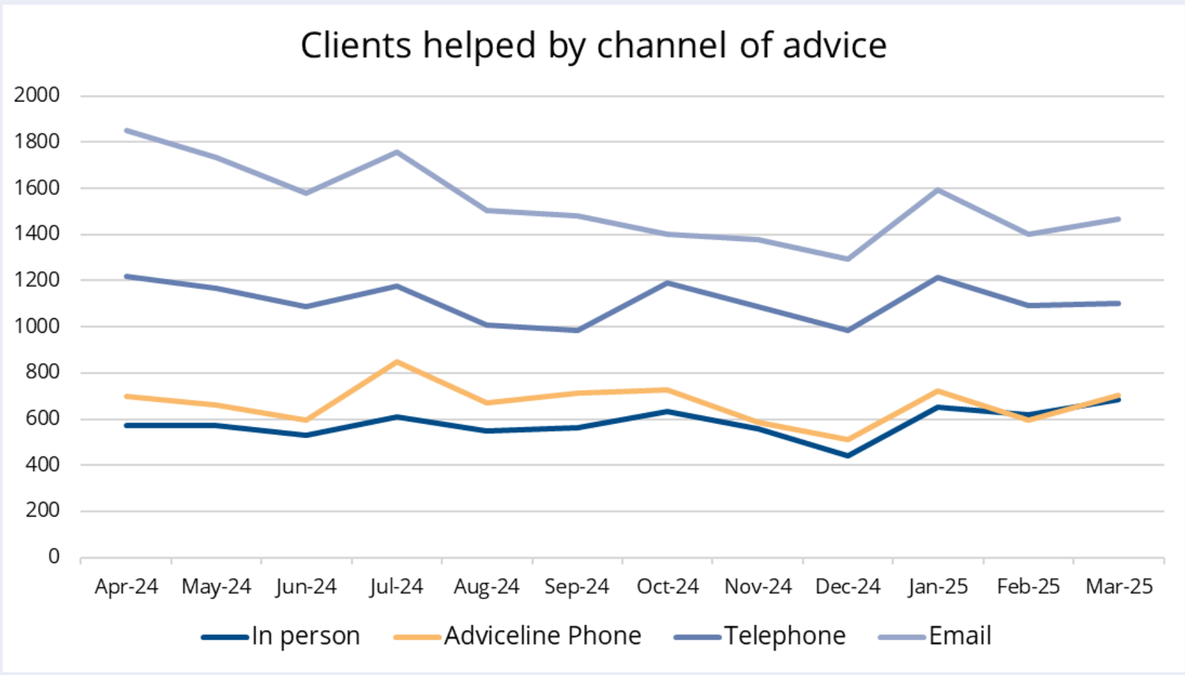
[Adviceline](#) - Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm (free call)

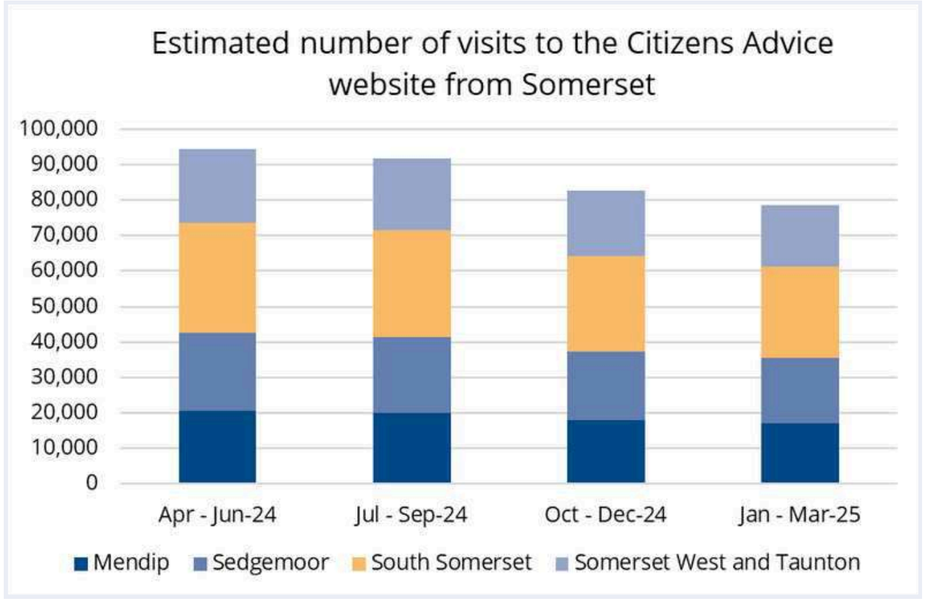
[Advice by email](#) - submit a request anytime on our website

[Advice in person](#) - visit a community access point near you

Advice however you need it

We deliver advice in different ways so people can get advice how *they* need it. The challenge for us is anticipating demand across the different channels so we can be responsive to client need.

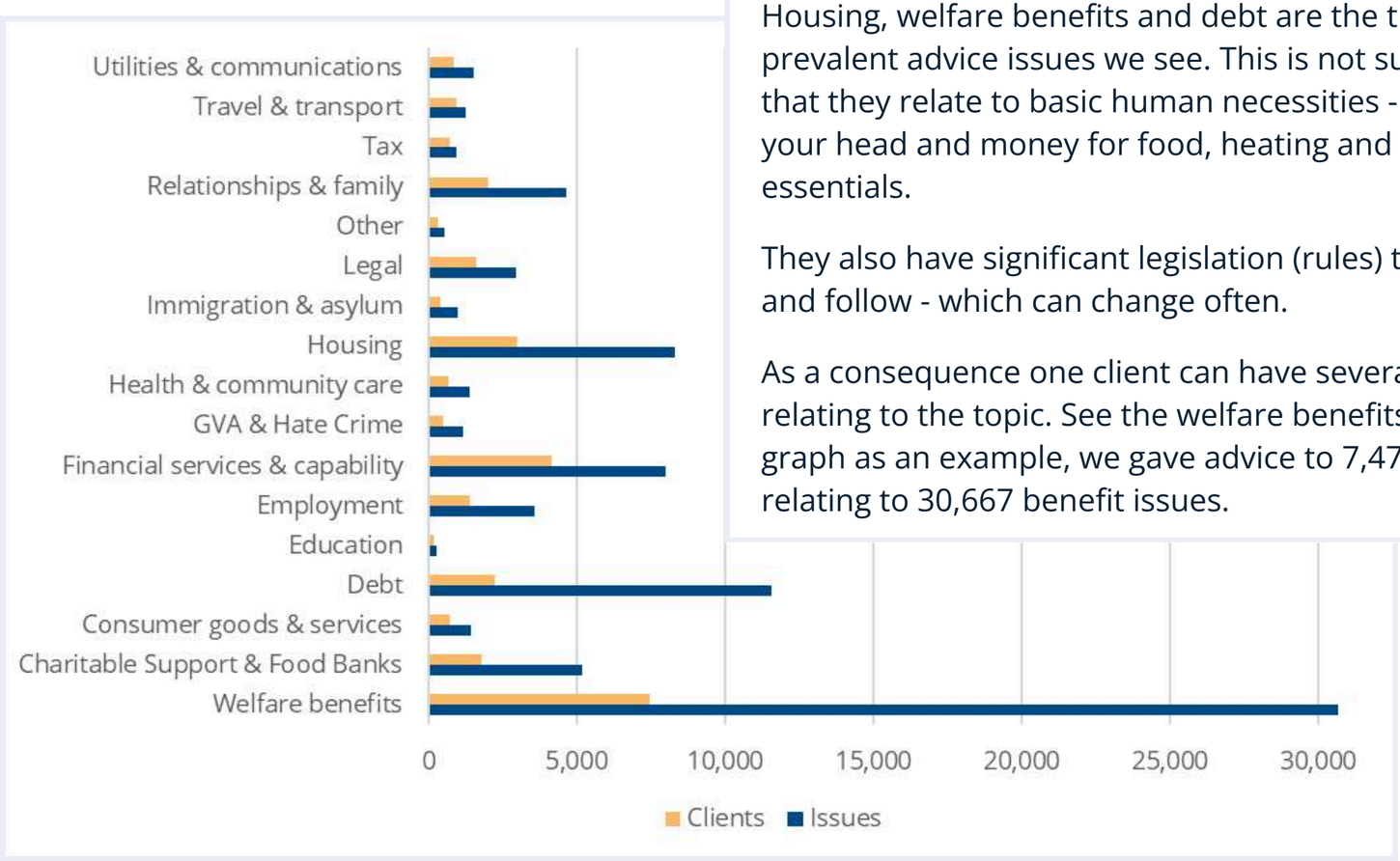




The **Citizens Advice website** has thousands of advice pages empowering people who have access to the internet - and feel confident using it - to self-help.

The problems people are facing

For some clients, we're able to provide advice at their first point of contact to resolve the issue or empower them to address the problem themselves using the advice we've provided. But **over half** (56%) of our clients have more complicated advice needs requiring further advice or casework to resolve the problem.



Housing, welfare benefits and debt are the three most prevalent advice issues we see. This is not surprising given that they relate to basic human necessities - a roof over your head and money for food, heating and other essentials.

They also have significant legislation (rules) to understand and follow - which can change often.

As a consequence one client can have several issues relating to the topic. See the welfare benefits column of the graph as an example, we gave advice to 7,478 clients relating to 30,667 benefit issues.

Jared’s story

Jared* got in touch because he’d received a possession order from the court, he was worried that his family (including young children) would become homeless. Jared had received no paperwork from the court.

Jared had £1,600 in historic rent arrears and was repaying this in instalments of £100 a month to his landlord but due to a disabling accident he had been unable to work and struggled to maintain the repayments. This is what led to the court action.

We advised Jared about his legal rights and options, including his right to apply to the court to suspend the order and arrange an affordable repayment plan based on his reduced income.

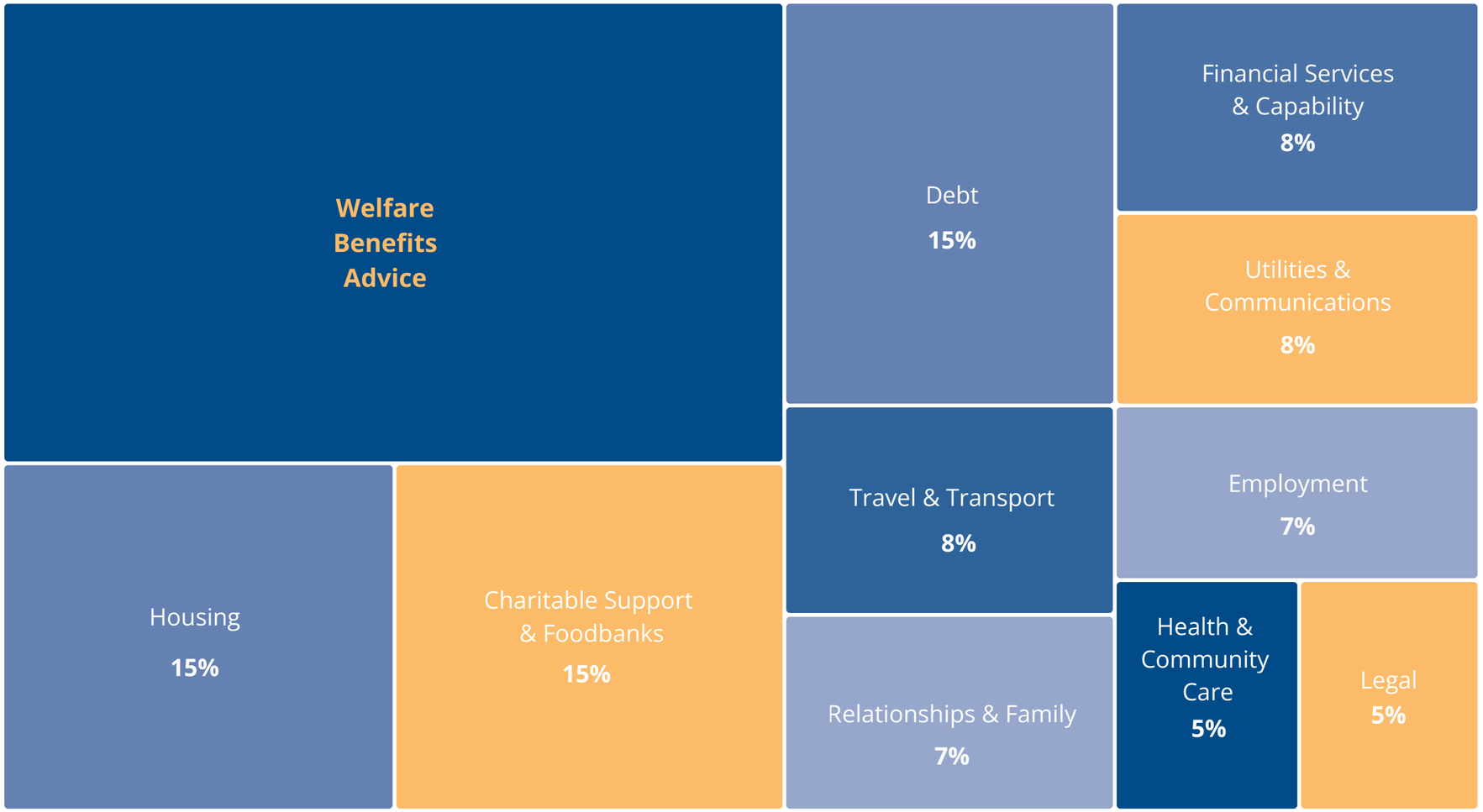
We helped to draft the court paperwork and a separate application for help with the associated court fees, to ensure the family avoid homelessness.

We’re continuing to support Jared and his wife to address their wider financial challenges to: maximise the family income and prevent the debt from worsening. We’re also advising on the debt options so that Jared and his family can make informed choices to resolve the issues.

Jared’s story is not unique. We’re seeing an increasing number of clients who contact us about a specific problem and when we explore the whole situation there are often several other inter-linked advice needs that we address as part of our holistic approach to advice.

*Not real name

Advice complexities



Jared's case shows how a single query is often interconnected with other problems that also require advice.

This chart shows the other advice needs that existed for clients who sought our advice about a welfare benefit issue during 2024-25.

This means our advice teams needs to be skilled across all advice topic areas in order to provide a holistic and smooth client advice journey.

Nb. issues totaling less than 5% not included

Improving specialist help

During 2024-25 our aim was to increase the capacity of our **specialist services** by training more staff and volunteers as expert advisers and case workers.

We undertook a whole-service assessment of training and development needs and cross-referenced this to our in-depth community advice needs assessment. This enabled us to produce and deliver an internal training calendar of workshops, covering a wide range of relevant client skills and advice topics to all volunteers and staff. This work continues into 2025-26 alongside embedding a new competency-based framework of learning and development.

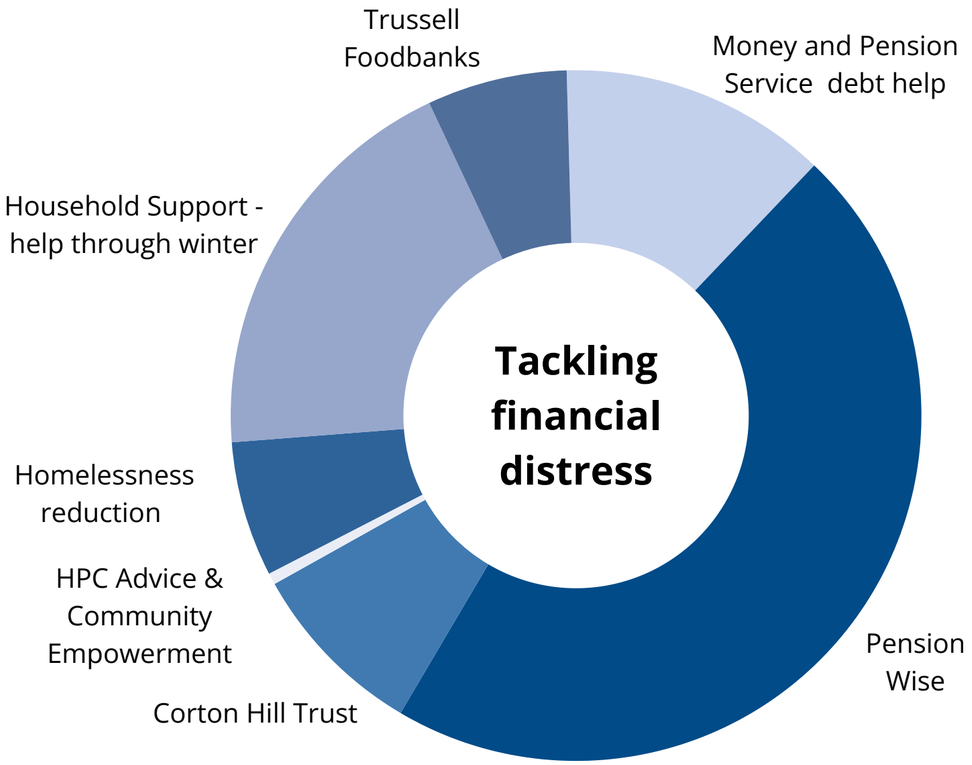
Prior to our merger, access to debt and welfare benefit advice and casework was dependent on local funding agreements which led to disparity across Somerset. Now we can direct funding more fairly and target areas of high need and provide appointments with specialist debt caseworkers in a wider range of community settings, bringing help into more areas of Somerset.

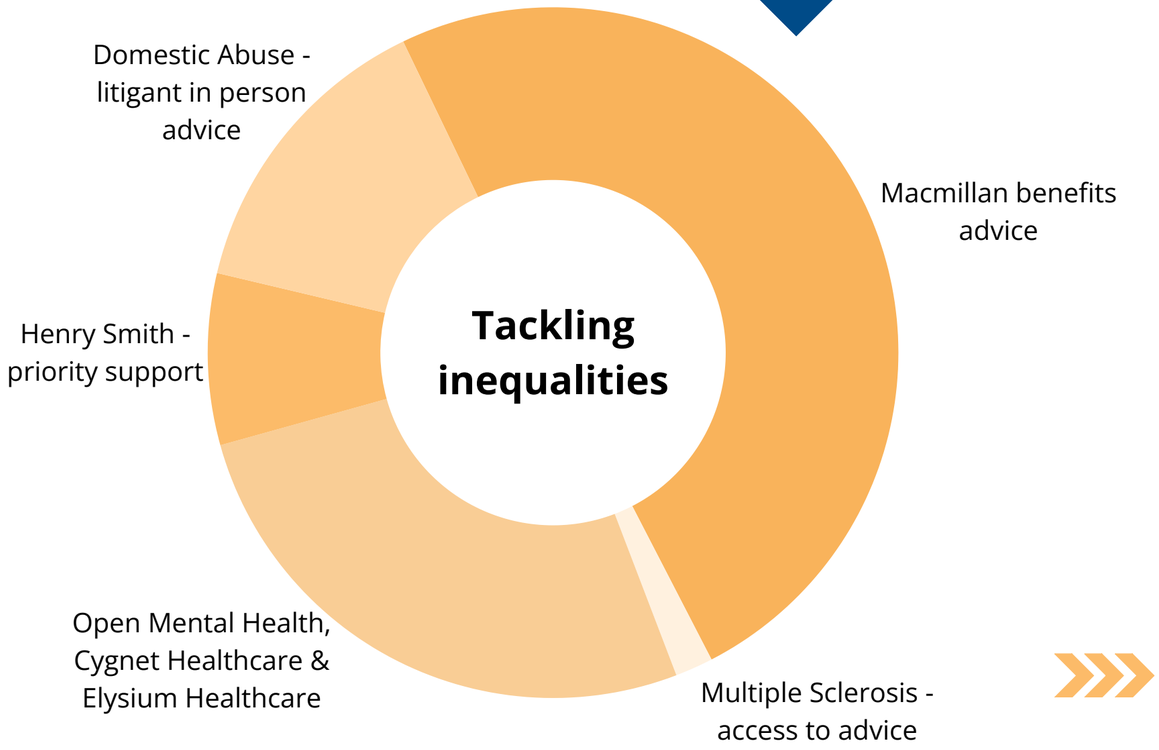
We worked with a range of key partners to establish quick and easy routes into advice for their clients and service users, including: Foodbanks, Navigate, Parent Carer Forum, SASP, Somerset Community Foundation, Village Agents, Warm Space Hubs and many more.

Specialist help

People are often surprised about the range of specialist advice services we provide across the county.

We delivered a number of additional advice projects or services during 2024-25 and each served an identified need in Somerset, beyond the scope of generalist advice. Taking on these activities ensures that specialist advisers and caseworkers are in the right places, providing targeted help to people in very complicated situations.





Paula’s story

While collecting a food parcel **Paula*** spoke with our foodbank adviser - their role is to address the underlying causes of food poverty.

The adviser established that Paula had debts but didn’t feel able to address this. Paula had a learning disability (with limited literacy and numeracy), mental ill health and some physical health issues she hadn’t discussed with her GP. Paula was vulnerable.

We focused on maximising Paula’s income and advised that she appeared to be eligible to receive Personal Independence Payment (PIP). It transpired that Paula had tried to apply herself but had not been successful, she had scored no points in either the daily living or mobility categories.

We helped Paula to gather supporting evidence and challenge the PIP decision.

She received the appeal paperwork (nearly 200-pages). We went through with Paula highlighting which aspects of PIP she met and why. We advised her about what to expect at the tribunal appeal hearing so she felt confident to attend.

Paula was awarded the enhanced rate of both components of PIP, receiving £19,000 of arrears, which enabled her to clear her debts. The continuing payments of £184 a week ensures she can avoid further debt and has the financial resources for her essential expenditure and won’t need to rely on the foodbank again.

*Not real name

Addressing wider issues

People face far more problems than they should because policy fails them. No-one sees that more than we do. Citizens Advice helps more people with more problems than anyone else, this gives us a unique insight into the challenges people are facing today.

It is recognised that the best way to tackle any problem is to treat the cause, not just the symptoms. We use our evidence, to show big organisations – from companies right up to government – how they can fix the underlying causes of problems and make things better for people. We have a key role in speaking up for clients, raising issues brought to us, contributing to public debate and informing policy. To that end, alongside our advice delivery we also undertake:

- strategic project work focusing on specific challenges identified in Somerset, and
- research and campaign activities using our evidence and insights to show policy makers where things aren't working, and
- awareness campaigns to prevent problems from happening e.g. scam awareness, energy saving.

Our goal? To be a force for change so people in Somerset face far fewer problems.

Somerset data dashboard

If you'd like a real-time insight into the problems people are facing in Somerset visit our online data dashboard link and explore the anonymised data. Updated monthly and providing a unique overview of the advice issues, changes over time, client profiles.

Food resilience in Somerset

We see a huge number of people in food crisis and poverty each year and we know it's just the tip of the iceberg. So with funding from Somerset Integrated Care Board and Somerset Council we were able to host a community development worker to support the Food Resilience Steering Group and bring stakeholders together to work towards a Food Strategy for Somerset.

There are a wide array of food resilience and food security organisations in Somerset, from food banks, community pantries, fridges, larders and freezers, to food projects, kitchen facilities/venues and growing & gardening initiatives. We brought them all together in one **interactive Somerset food map**. We also created a **food event** calendar to raise awareness and increase engagement.

We invited charitable and not-for profit organisation/community groups with a great idea - that contributes to food resilience in Somerset - to apply for a one-off grants.

We awarded **£43,000** of grant funding to **25** food organisations across the county - expanding food resilience and food security in Somerset.

Visit our **food project web pages** to find out more about this project.

New concept and pathway

Our client-focused research showed us that whilst we are well-known, there are some communities of people that don't access us when they need advice, preferring instead to turn to people they already know and trust. One such group is young people aged 16-24 - a strategic project was needed.

We worked in collaboration with Somerset Youth Work Alliance to co-produce '**Advice First Aid**' which we then delivered to **45 youth workers** from **15 organisations**, who support **3,500 young people** across Somerset.

Advice First Aid training gives people the tools to: spot an advice issue, empower self-help where possible, provide information and signposting support, and identify when and how to refer for full advice or specialist help. We saw a **13%** increase of young people accessing our advice services as a result.

The feedback was phenomenal! Everyone who received Advice First Aid training said they felt confident to use their new tools to support a young person and they'd recommend the training to other professionals or organisations. **Our impact data on this work** is on our website.

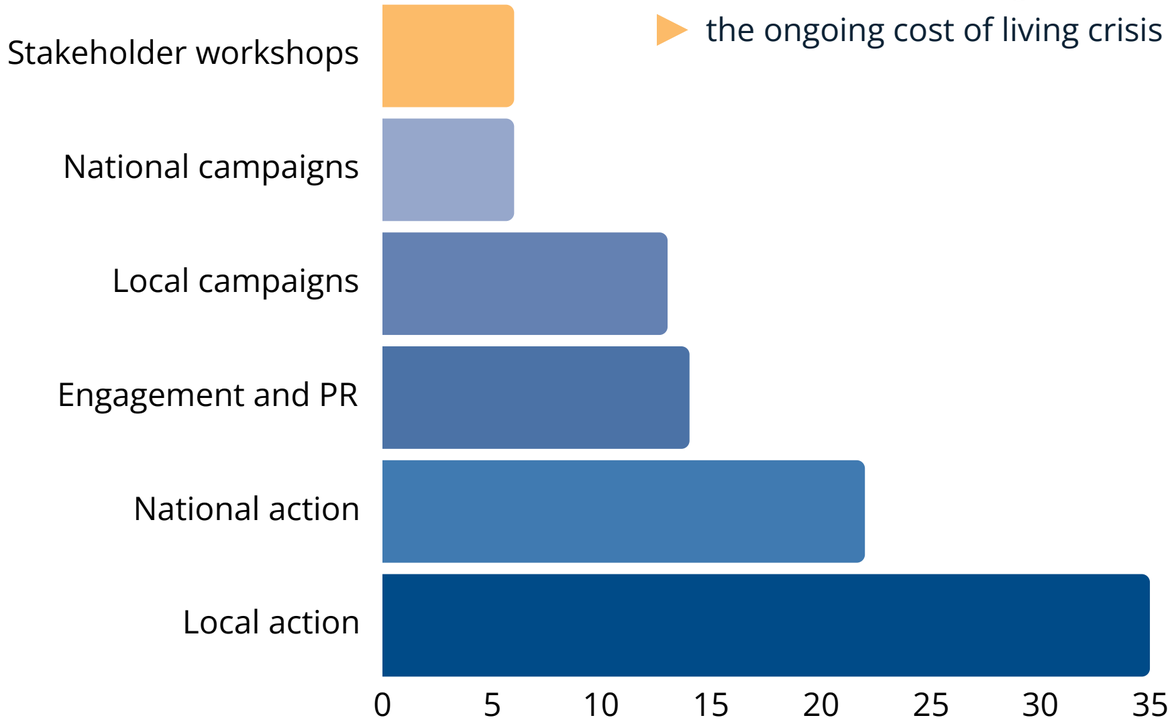
Newly qualified Advice First Aiders from: The Space, In the Mix, Young Somerset, and Langport Youth Group.

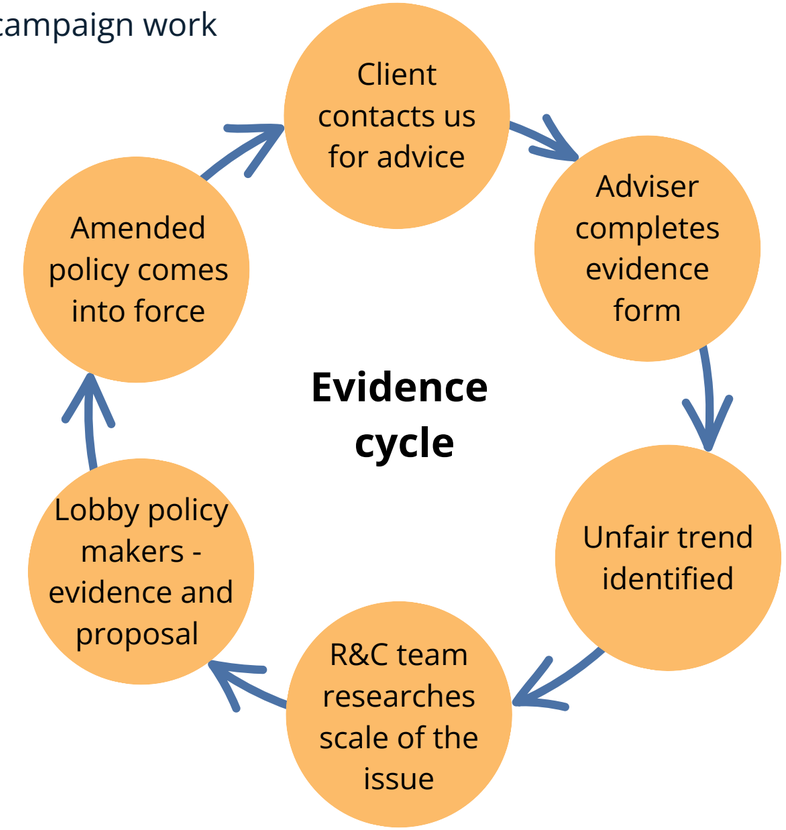
Campaigning for change

At Citizens Advice Somerset we have the following mantra **“When the advice runs out, we campaign for change”**.

By this we mean that when an unfairness exists due to law or policy our advisers complete an evidence form describing the impact to that individual client. Our research and campaign team collate this evidence to identify the big issues we need to speak out on. The team had a busy and successful year. We embraced **three priorities** during 2024-25:

- improving awareness of our research and campaign work
- elections and a new government
- the ongoing cost of living crisis





Successes this year

Improving awareness of our research and campaign work

We highlighted trends in all internal comms, delivered best practice workshops for advisers and celebrated successes. We refreshed our **R&C web content and launched a quarterly newsletter** that we share with stakeholders. And we participated in a number of stakeholder and community events.

Elections and a new government

We engaged with all prospective MP candidates and once all the new MPs were in post we met with them and their teams to provide insight data on the issues affecting their constituents. We have lobbied them hard on parliamentary matters and were thrilled to see all Somerset MPs vote against the proposed welfare reforms.

The ongoing cost of living crisis

We engaged on social media throughout the year and also promoted 7 partner campaigns. We were on the TV, radio or had press releases published over a dozen times covering everything from the impact of the energy price cap to local Council Tax reduction policy.

But our most impactful work this year was addressing **Somerset's Flooring Lottery** - our campaign to have social and council housing providers agree not to tear out flooring before new tenants move into a property. Which is costly for tenants and is contributing to fuel poverty.

We presented our evidence and a 'call for action' at a Somerset social housing directors meeting. They agreed to our proposal in principle and are in the process of taking action. We'll continue to push for all to sign up to a Somerset flooring retention policy - if we are successful, Somerset will be the first county in England to adopt this approach.

Our impact

Every single day, we hear from people who've hit rock bottom. People who feel like they have nowhere to turn. Our advisers are a lifeline, providing expert advice and practical support to people facing unthinkable challenges. Advice changes lives - but don't take our word for it - take it from our clients...

> If the country was run by Citizens Advice we would all be okay!

> I can't thank you enough for all the help and advice you have given me over these extremely difficult few years. Your advice has been invaluable when I had nowhere else to turn. I really appreciate it. Here's to my fresh start beginning now.

> Thanks for your reply. It is so heartwarming how you take the time to go through everything and answer my questions. It makes me feel heard and supported in this very distressing time of my life.

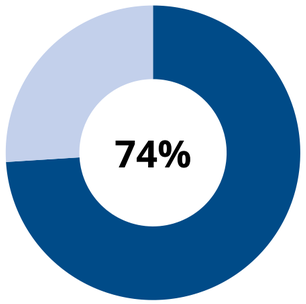
> You have been a shining light in a dark time for me and I want you to know that it really helped a lot and I appreciate all your efforts. Keep doing what you do.

> Your help, support and advice over this horrendous time has been invaluable and I'm incredibly grateful to you for all that you have done.

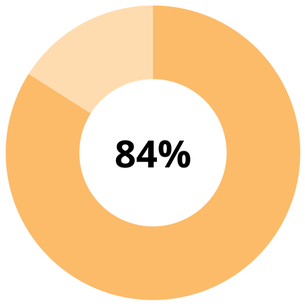
> I now don't feel so alone as I have been for the last few years. If you seek help - and yes they are busy - but persevere and help will come...we are not alone.

Client experience

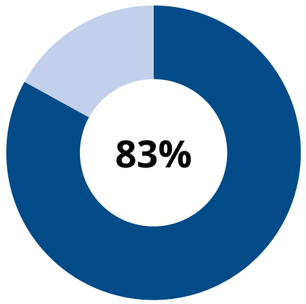
Alongside narrative feedback from clients we also undertake anonymous client experience surveys. We think the numbers speak for themselves.



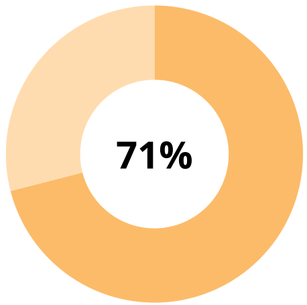
Felt their problem needed immediate or urgent action when they contacted us



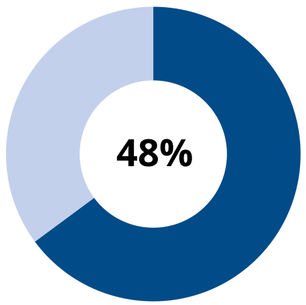
said we helped them to find a way forward



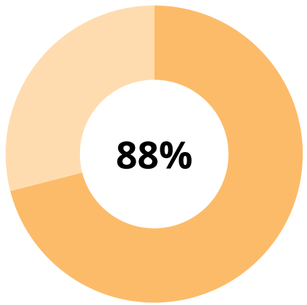
said they wouldn't have been able to sort out their problem without our help



said they felt less stressed, depressed or anxious as a result of our help



felt their physical health had improved as a result of our help



would recommend Citizens Advice Somerset to others

Our value to individuals

The average financial outcomes in **£ per person** for the 20,214 people we helped in 2024–25

£94.40

In debts written off

£429.38

In benefit income gain (annual)

£11.16

In benefit income gain (one off)

£3.30

In charitable grants / help)

Our value to society

We provide more than individual value. Our advice work also delivers wider financial savings. This means that we save government and society money by stopping problems that cost money.

For every **£1** spent on Citizens Advice Somerset, we delivered:

£3.39

in savings to government and public services, equating to an estimated **£7.6 million** in total. Preventing problems from occurring or escalating reduces pressure on other services like health, housing and benefits.

£24.86

in wider economic and social benefits, equating to an estimated **£56.1 million** in total. Helping to solve problems contributes to better wellbeing, participation and productivity for the people we help.

£14.74

in value to the people we help, equating to an estimated **£33.3 million** through debts written off, access to benefits and resolved advice issues.

The **technical annex** sets out the method and data behind the estimates of our value.

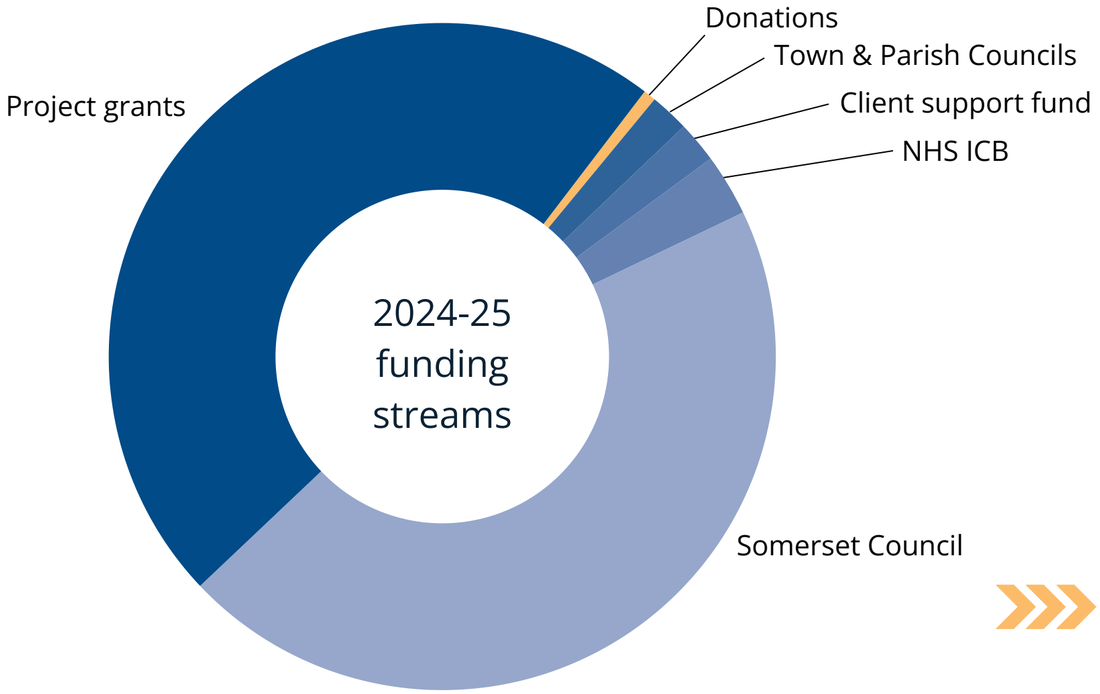
Fundraising

As a local charity we need to raise the necessary funds to deliver our services. We do this in a variety of ways, including funding applications to statutory services, donations from individuals and companies, grants from foundations or trusts, and creative community events.

During 2024-25 some of our team did a sponsored abseil down Shepton Mallet prison which raised **£1,438.55**.

We were Oake Manor's Club Captain's Charity of the Year. With a number of events across the year, including an ABBA night, James Bond casino night and dinner and a charity golf day with fabulous prizes. We received **£10,335** from Oake Manor and are incredibly grateful to them and all our contributors.

Could you **support us** so we can continue our work?



Looking ahead

We've reviewed our service and set ourselves some ambitious objectives for the coming year and beyond to 2027.
Our four priority pillars are:

Capacity | **Complexity** | **Inclusion** | **Resilience**

You can read the detail supporting each pillar in our **strategic objectives 2025-2027** available on our website.

As a client-centred service it's unsurprising that we will be focusing on the wider (social) determinants of health such as child poverty and deprivation - addressing these issues through our advice services, advocacy, and campaign work, will contribute towards improved health and well being in Somerset.

Complimenting this work will be our expansion of Advice First Aid. Building on the successes of this year we will roll out this essential training to community groups and organisations supporting people living and working across the Hinkley Point C area.

With funding from Somerset Integrated Care Board we will also establish a Keyworker Housing Hub, providing support for Health & Social Care staff in Somerset who are seeking accommodation and need advice. This work will contribute to Somerset's ability to recruit and retain essential staff and services.

Thank you

We are grateful to all our supporters (large, small and individual) for helping us to make such a difference in Somerset.

Find out more about us at **citizensadvicesomerset.org.uk**