

It's time we went digital

**Annual Report
2020/2021**



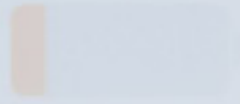
**cyngor ar
bopeth**

**citizens
advice**

**Sir y Fflint
Flintshire**

Charity Registration Number: 1090010

Charity Company Number: 03985923



16% Charged

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Our Aims and Principles

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We provide free, confidential, independent and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

The advice we provide is available to anyone who lives in or visits Flintshire. When first contacting us, we will discuss your issue and help you decide on the best way forward. This could be to book an appointment with us, help you find the information you need on our website, or signpost you to another advice provider.

Confidentiality - We offer complete confidentiality to enquirers. Nothing learned, including the fact of their visits, will be passed on to anyone outside the service without their express permission.

Free - All our services are free to clients at the point of delivery, meaning that anyone can access advice no matter what their background or circumstances.

Our vision is that Citizens Advice Flintshire, through advice and campaigning, will help to create a fairer Flintshire where people are empowered, treated equally and have their rights respected.

Independence - Our service is completely independent. We are not part of the government or any other statutory body and are therefore free to take up issues with the appropriate authority on behalf of individuals or groups.

Impartiality - We will tell people about their rights and responsibilities based on our extensive information system. We don't judge anybody or make any assumptions about anyone who comes to us for advice. We are open to everybody, irrespective of ability, age, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and social or economic status.



Gavin Wainwright



Is there a date on the letter that the form needs to be completed by?



Yes, the letter says December 13th

Okay, thank you. I can book you in for a telephone appointment with us, where one of our advisors can help you complete the form



Thank you so much, that's a huge relief





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Chair's Report

I am so proud to have been part of Citizens Advice Flintshire during 2020/2021. The response of our team to pivot to delivering advice in a new way, whilst also personally dealing with the pandemic themselves, is incredible. During the pandemic, we've seen a change in the areas of advice that people have needed us for, with a huge rise in employment related enquiries. The pandemic also exposed inequalities in society we already knew existed. Our team has been there to help people navigate very challenging situations in ever changing environments.

Unfortunately, I think we continue to have challenging times ahead of us. With several measures that were put in place to try and alleviate the impact of COVID-19 coming to end, we are going to see people who were dependent on that support requiring our help. In addition, many people who are not able to access services through phone and digital channels may have not come forward for advice, resulting in their situations getting worse.

As we go forward, we have to try and ensure that our services are accessible to everyone but also support people in the way they need it. We've been delivering advice remotely for some time now and as things open, we are looking forward to welcoming people back to our office. However, we are entering a new hybrid environment of delivering advice digitally and in person which may be tricky to start with but I have no doubt that we will navigate this new environment and ensure that people get the advice they need.

Citizens Advice Flintshire Chair
Laura Clays

L Clays



Friends



Discover





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My Network



Jobs



Messaging

Chief Executive's report

This report demonstrates how our people responded to what will hopefully be a once in our lifetime pandemic. Our thoughts go to the people and families who experienced loss during this period, including CAF staff and volunteers.

The service has seen significant changes, particularly in the rapid development of technology, enabling us to communicate with people. We are working very hard to ensure that we maintain the gains and lessons learnt during this period to enable us to help more people.

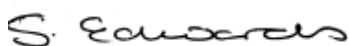
Some of our work however does not change. As the measures put in place to protect people during the pandemic start to come to an end, we have become involved in campaigning to retain the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift. People have not yet returned to 'normal living', some are still unable to work and the costs of food and utilities continue to rise. People are often shocked to hear that Universal Credit for a single person is just £74 per week. An extension to the uplift was given and, as I write now, we continue to campaign for a further extension or, preferably, a permanent uplift of £20 a week. We help people when they need it and use what they tell us to campaign to make society a fairer place.

My personal reflection is on how we, as a service, have missed the volunteers. Fortunately, we do now have a team working remotely but the vibrancy and atmosphere of the service is subdued and I very much look forward to welcoming them back when it is safe to do so.

I'm also very grateful to the board for their commitment during the last twelve months and am pleased to have welcome two new board members during that time: Paul Bevan and Sally Griffiths-Parry.

A personal thanks to all of those who kept the service going during this period.

Salli Edwards
CEO



What shaped our year

COVID-19 has changed the life of millions of people. The virus spread from China to the UK in January 2020 and it didn't take long before it began to affect businesses and organisations like ours. On 23 March 2020, the UK went into a nationwide lockdown. The governments imposed a stay-at-home order banning all non-essential travel and contact with other people. They shut almost all schools, businesses and gathering places. Those with symptoms, and their households, were told to self-isolate, while those with certain illnesses were told to shield themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on Citizens Advice Flintshire (CAF). Overnight we were forced to close all of our offices around Flintshire and had to start delivering advice from within our homes. Initially this was extremely challenging, and, as a local charity, we didn't have the IT resources immediately available to enable over 100 staff and volunteers to work from home. We had to stand down our volunteers whilst our staff did their best to support and deliver advice to the people of Flintshire who have never needed us more. COVID-19 had taken over any problems we had before and was now the biggest issue facing our clients. People were hit with businesses closing, losing jobs, being made redundant, trying to understand and claim furlough, renting issues and the no end of other worries that the pandemic brought with it. However with every negative in life, we must focus on the positives.

Despite the difficulties the pandemic caused our service, our people stepped up and ensured we remained a presence in our local community. Although our organisation was not tackling the pandemic in the same way our NHS was fighting this disease, we understood our role and knew that other problems would occur due to the challenging environment we now lived in.

We have made it so much easier to contact us from the comfort of your own home. Although still piloting many channels, we have begun to introduce chat services such as Messenger, WhatsApp and webchat. You can also now use video conferencing such as Attend Anywhere and Zoom, to receive advice. You can still speak to us by telephone on our local helpline or you can 'contact us' via our website. We will be returning to face to face but are trying to ensure that it is available for those that need it most. Using digital means we can help many more people. However, we will not be giving up on our digital developments anytime soon as it has enabled us to reach more people and we fully understand the need for this in the future.

The entire Citizens Advice Flintshire team has adapted quickly, learnt many new IT skills and we are all extremely proud to say that we can now deliver our service from anywhere. Tackling cultural change and doing things differently is often challenging to overcome. Although forced by a pandemic, we have adapted our ways of working to go fully digital in an extremely short space of time. Here, lessons were learned, errors were made, and successes were born. COVID-19 has not just shaped the year for CAF, it has opened up different avenues and different ways of working. A tough test no doubt, but one the organisation tackled with resilience and determination.



**We helped a
total of
4,168
people**

**We
answered
1,849
phone calls**

**We
dealt with
23,482
separate
advice issues**

**We
advised on
7,591
employment
issues**

**We
supported
1,010
individual
clients with
employment
issues**

**We dealt
with
£939,911
of debt**

How COVID-19 affected the advice we gave

We helped fewer people this year (4,167 compared with 6,169 the previous year), which is likely to be the result of a number of factors including: our offices being closed due to lockdown restrictions, the majority of benefit assessments and appeals being on hold during this time, payment holidays offered by lenders on mortgage and debt repayments, a freeze on evictions, and the up-rating in Universal Credit rates. We anticipate that as these reprieves come to an end, we are likely to see a steep rise in client numbers again.

Benefits is usually our biggest enquiry area, but for the first time in our history it was employment. We helped 1,010 people with over 7,500 employment problems. People contacted us for help regarding the furlough scheme, job insecurity, unpaid wages due to businesses struggling financially, unfair treatment by their employer and concerns about health & safety at work e.g. employer not enforcing social distancing rules properly. We also had many self-employed people contacting us to ask about any government support that they might be entitled to. Many people who used our service for the first time had never been in a position where they have had to contemplate claiming benefits before and we supported them to navigate what can be a very complex system.



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We have always depended on our wonderful volunteers to be able to deliver our service however for the first time ever, the majority of our volunteering team were forced to go home and pause all volunteering work due to the closure of our offices.

We have people volunteering with us from all walks of life with a wide range of experience. In December, we started a trial return of 10 volunteers. These volunteers have been answering calls to our local helpline number, and carrying out advice appointments, such as benefits form-filling and appeals, over the telephone. This has been working well, so in February we welcomed back a further 3 volunteers. They have been responding to client website/email enquiries. We continue to maintain contact with the rest of our volunteer workforce as we look to bring more back on board as soon as we are able to do so.

"I feel that help provided to clients has been good and the overall experience may be better because of convenience. In some cases a more remote contact may be easier to cope with. However, it is difficult not being able to see written information such as letters. There has been good support both in training and during the session by the supervisor."

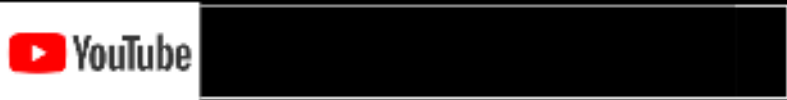
Leyland, Volunteer

"It was good to get back to being able to dealing with clients. After the first couple of sessions getting used to the system everything works well. After each session I've felt I've spent my time in a worthwhile way, hopefully the clients feel the same!"

Huw, Volunteer

We also hope to take on new volunteers as soon as we can facilitate this. There are lots of benefits to volunteering with us, from developing skills, gaining qualifications to knowing that you're spending your time helping people within your local community. Whatever the reason that inspires you to join us, you will have lots of fun volunteering in a challenging and rewarding environment where you will meet some great people.





What we campaigned for

We were pleased to launch our free local telephone number in December 2020. This year we answered over 4,000 phone calls from people needing to access free life changing advice and having a free phone number removed any barriers for potential clients.

In November 2020 we helped to promote the Big Energy Saving Winter (BESW) campaign that took place from November to January. The purpose of the campaign was to help people cut their energy bills and get the financial support they are entitled to. An additional aim of the promotional activity was to increase client numbers for the Warmer Wales Scheme and our Energy Advice Programme. Problems keeping a home warm can affect a family's health. It can be difficult to find out what help is available to get a better deal on energy bills, how to better insulate homes and to sort out problems like damp or a broken boiler. Our campaign aimed to help more people to check, switch and save. We supported our local community to access the right advice to help save money and improve lives.

In more energy related campaigning, we ran a competition for someone from Flintshire to win £100 towards the cost of their energy bills. This was the first competition of it's kind for Citizens Advice Flintshire and can be considered successful. The aim was simple, to promote our energy work and encourage people to talk to us about their energy usage at home and to see if we could help them. We held a Facebook Live event that was viewed by over 3,100 people and was shared by 45 people.

In March 2021 it was announced that the government was planning to remove the £20 Universal Credit uplift. With special thanks to Stewart Whyte, our team campaigned for this to be changed and continue to do so. After writing to MP's, the Welsh Government and sharing many social media posts, it was eventually decided that millions of Universal Credit claimants would continue to get a £20/week uplift for a further six months. Although this was considered a temporary victory, our team did all they could to ensure this campaign was a success and we continue to do so.

👍 31k 👎 3k ➡ Share



How to get advice

@ Email us

<https://flintshirecab.org.uk/get-advice/email/>

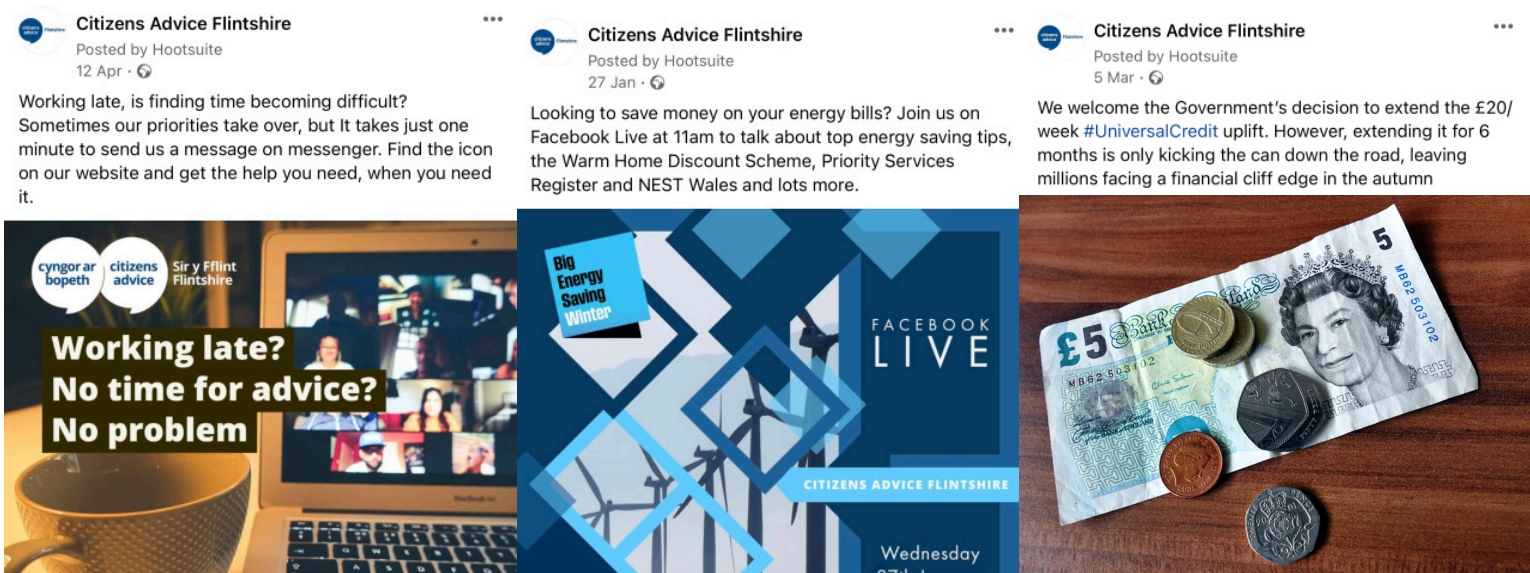
☎ Phone us

Free Citizens Advice Flintshire local helpline:
0808 278 7923

💬 Message us

Look for the icon on our website
flintshirecab.org.uk



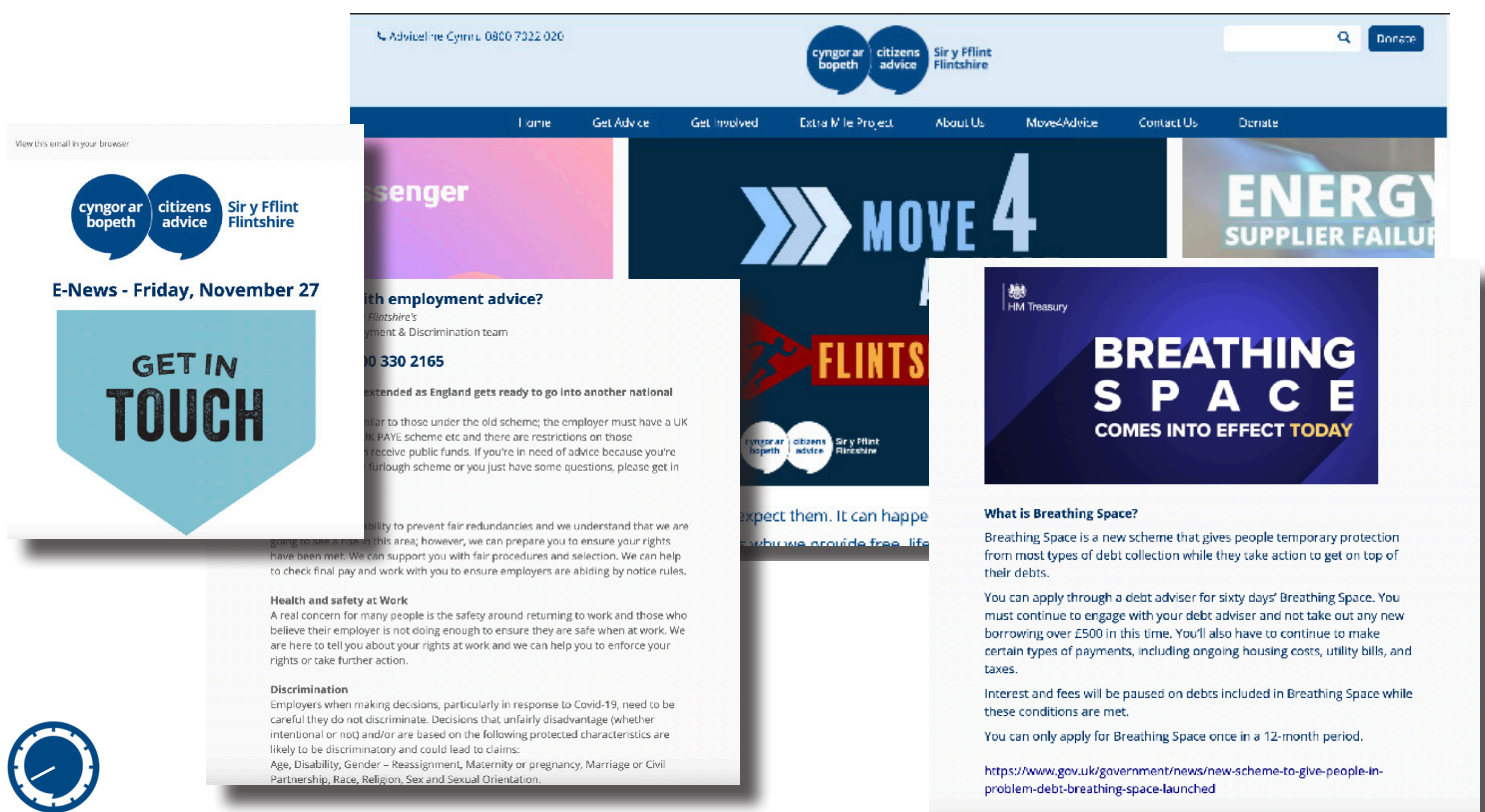


Marketing - Social media and E-news

Digital has never been more important for charities than in 2020/2021. COVID-19 not only forced charities to embrace remote working and deliver online services, but it also encouraged them to rethink their marketing and communication strategies. Here at CAF we were no different. We concentrated on high impact messages via social media informing our followers of how they could access advice in this new digital and continually changing world.

We looked to improve our information sharing via email news and we thought about how people could keep in touch with us. Our ever-growing database was a 'lifeline' for many Flintshire residents as we sent out important information about furlough, employment issues etc before they even had to ask us, or often even knew they needed it.

Our website became our fundamental public billboard and digital took over from the traditional methods of marketing materials such as posters and leaflets etc. As a marketing team we have gone virtually paperless! We hope you like our first ever digital only annual report.



Marketing Communications and Fundraising (MCF)

What a year it has been for the MCF team. We certainly had to make some snappy decisions. Initially, slightly panicked, and shocked by the speed we had to close the front doors, the team swung into action, and we did everything we possibly could to get funding for colleagues and volunteers to set up with IT in order to deliver crucial advice from within their homes. Our website and database were pivotal and became our main communication channels, as all 3 offices literally shut overnight.

We want to celebrate the amazing support that we have received this year from trusts, foundations and community businesses. We were able to buy laptops and all the equipment we needed to deliver the service remotely because of this support. The speed and efficiency of how the trusts swung into action to support us was truly heart-warming.

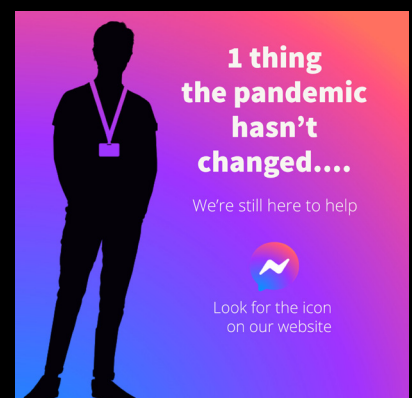
The best we could do initially was to communicate information as clearly and concisely as possible. Our team worked relentlessly to keep thousands of people throughout Flintshire fully informed and updated of rapid changing benefit, employment and furlough advice. Looking back now, we can say that we made the most of this difficult situation and, with the timely support from the Lottery Community Fund to support mental health, we have quickly digitised our service.

A special thanks to our supporters: The Moondance Foundation, Anne Duchess of Westminster, WCVA – Voluntary Services Recovery Fund, Lottery – Community Fund, FLVC – Emergency Fund, The Laspen Trust, The Oakdale Trust, Community Cohesion Fund, Moneysupermarket.com Community Fund, Tesco Community Fund and Kingspan.

We would also like to thank all of the local Town and Community Councils that support our service, Flintshire County Council and the Welsh Government.

Most of this would not be possible without the support of a special person called Lucie Mulvaney our Treasurer and Chair of our fundraising group. Lucie is always there to support the work of the MCF team and this year she has been instrumental in steering the digital developments. Her patience, time and positivity is always appreciated.

Finally, thank you to our own staff and volunteers who donate monthly to our Supporters Scheme and for those who have taken place in sponsored events this year such as Move4Advice, and to the many clients who have often hit very hard times, but still show their appreciation with a donation so we can go on helping others that need us.



Unmute



Video



Participants



Chat



Share Screen



Record

End



Following **For You**

Current Activities

Our Core Service (offices are currently closed) We have three main offices in Mold, Deeside and Holywell; they offer a range of service delivery channels including open door sessions, appointments, telephone, letter and home visits when feasible. Funding for the core service comes from Flintshire County Council with contributions from a number of Town and Community Councils.

Outreach Services (currently closed) - We run outreach services in GP's surgeries and for domestic abuse organisations. These are funded by Welsh Government via the Single Advice Fund.

Specialist Debt Advice - Debt advice is available for people living in Flintshire. We are increasingly promoting a self-help approach that empowers those that are able, with the right information and assistance, to solve their own problems; this allows us to target our full casework service to those in greatest need.

Specialist Employment and Discrimination Advice - We provide specialist employment and discrimination advice to help prevent or resolve workplace problems and to challenge all types of direct and indirect discrimination experienced in the workplace or via accessing goods and services. We deliver this service across North Wales. We also provide specialist Employment and Discrimination advice for the national telephone service known as the remote service.

Single Advice Fund- Our generalist advice service provides information and advice on housing, discrimination, welfare benefits, education and debt. This service is provided to agreed regional priority groups.

Flintshire Local Advice Gateway - This is a single point of access for partner agencies to refer clients with benefit or debt advice needs. Our triage system identifies the most appropriate next step for clients and refers to relevant providers. We deliver this service with funding from Flintshire County Council.



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1235



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Me



Following **For You**

Fuel Poverty Projects - We run a number of small projects focussed on identifying and assisting clients who fall within the definition of 'fuel poor'.

- Big Energy Saving Network delivers a programme of outreach to vulnerable consumers, focussing on helping them reduce their energy costs through assisting with actions such as choosing tariffs, switching suppliers and the take up of energy efficiency offers.
- Big Energy Saving Week funds events and publicity to spread information on how to save energy and thus achieve cheaper bills.
- Warmer Wales scheme, funded by the British Gas Energy Trust, delivers in depth advice sessions to help people with a range of home energy concerns.

Parent Partnership Service - We provide advice, information and support for parents/guardians of children with additional learning needs. The role of the caseworker is to help parents understand procedures, express their views and deal with any paperwork in connection with the learning needs of their child. The role also ensures that clients are accessing all their benefit and grant entitlements.

Welfare Rights Service - Funded by Flintshire County Council to provide specialist benefits advice and casework, the Welfare Rights Service is delivered by CAF to ensure the most effective use of resources, to reduce duplication and to compliment the FLAG service.

EU Settled Status (EUSS) Project - We provide advice on settled status applications and in-depth, specialist help on social welfare issues, including supporting EU, EEA or Swiss citizens living in the UK, and their families, to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021.

The Extra Mile Project - This project has been funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and runs from November 2020 until 2023. The project provides advice to people with mental ill health and provides improved access to our service via new and improved channels including digital advice, local phone line, working together with support workers, home visits, referrals from GP's and an outreach service at Wrexham Maelor Hospital. The aim is to provide people with earlier intervention to stop situations escalating and getting worse.



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Home



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Me



google

**Finance matters**

About 8,670,000,000 results (0.58 seconds)

A strong financial base is an important element in maintaining our valuable service to the community. This Corona virus affected year has created numerous challenges and problems that we have endeavoured to find solutions for. Our 40 plus staff were suddenly working from home and the majority required laptops and work mobile phones as well as new software packages, such as Zoom, Docusign and Attend Anywhere in order to continue to provide our services to clients. However all this new equipment and technology was very expensive, especially when demand for laptops was forcing the prices higher. Thankfully we received some very generous grants to cover our unexpected additional IT PPE and staff costs resulting from the Pandemic (Please refer to the marketing section for a full list of donors).

The Welsh Government, Flintshire County Council, Citizens Advice and the National Lottery have continued to fund our various advice services and this year we achieved a small surplus. This surplus will be used to set a balanced, rather than deficit budget for the first time in many years.

Our reserves policy is to hold free reserves of between four to six months of running costs to provide an adequate buffer to enable the wind-down of the service and meet our contractual obligations should we lose significant funding. For a Citizens Advice local office the reserves policy will be informed chiefly by funding risk and take into account the fact that (as a rule) local offices have little trading income (compared to say charities such as Oxfam). We do not have endowment funds that generate income and we rely almost exclusively on contracts / grant income from funders with a short timescale. All this means that compared to many charities a local office would typically need a relatively higher level of reserves to reflect this uncertain operating model.

For full details please see a copy of our Audited Accounts.

A special mention and thank you to all the following:

Buckley Town Council

Mold Town Council

Holywell Town Council

Penyffordd Community Council

Northop Community Council

Leeswood and Pontblyddyn Community Council





We need your support!

Here at Citizens Advice Flintshire, we are no different to other well known charities within the third sector. We work hard to generate income every year to continue providing a free service.

Traditional fundraising techniques are becoming more difficult to carry out under the current circumstances. Digital is now the easiest form of giving to charities.

Like numerous charities, we rely on goodwill and financial contributions to continue providing a valued service; a service which has been part of the Flintshire community for 80 years and will, with your help, be here for the next 80 years.

You can donate to the charity in multiple ways via the website but we would love to see more people sign up to our supporters scheme.

By becoming a member of the Citizens Advice Flintshire Supporters Scheme for just £4 a month you will be helping to support some of the most vulnerable people in your local community.

flintshirecab.org.uk/become-a-supporter

The advice we give turns lives around as people seek help feeling, stressed, anxious, depressed and hopeless. We do our absolute best to support people whenever they need us.



Flintshire residents have been heartwarmingly generous in the past and we have accepted many donations from clients who have been so grateful for our help. These individual gifts are a true expression of gratitude, but many donors want to help further, so our Supporters Scheme was established to recognise their ongoing support. With just a £4.00 monthly donation, those wishing to contribute to our service are helping us plan for the future, knowing we've got money coming in each month.

Aside from pro-actively encouraging potential donors to help us financially, we're also building our communications database so clients are kept informed of our work through our digital newsletter. Clients on the database will also benefit from targeted help and guidance on matters relevant to them as well as keeping abreast of our research and campaigning activities.



Contact Us

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