



Half-Year Funding Report for Shepton Mallet Town Council

This report covers the first six months of the current funding year i.e. 1st April - 31st Sept 2021. Shepton Mallet Town Council (SMTC) funds Citizens Advice Mendip (CAM) at £10,000 pa.

In this, the second year of the pandemic, CAM has continued to provide the residents of Shepton Mallet and the wider community with a consistent and quality advice service.

In the first year, we successfully adapted our face-to-face drop-in service (at Highfield House and four other venues across Mendip) to one which was wholly delivered by telephone and email as our response to the lock-down and social distancing restrictions.

In this second year, we took the strategic decision to maintain our telephone (freephone Adviceline) and email services as our primary channels for advice. Alongside this, we have continued to provide an appointment based face-to-face service for vulnerable or complex clients, and are now piloting face-to-face video advice appointments.

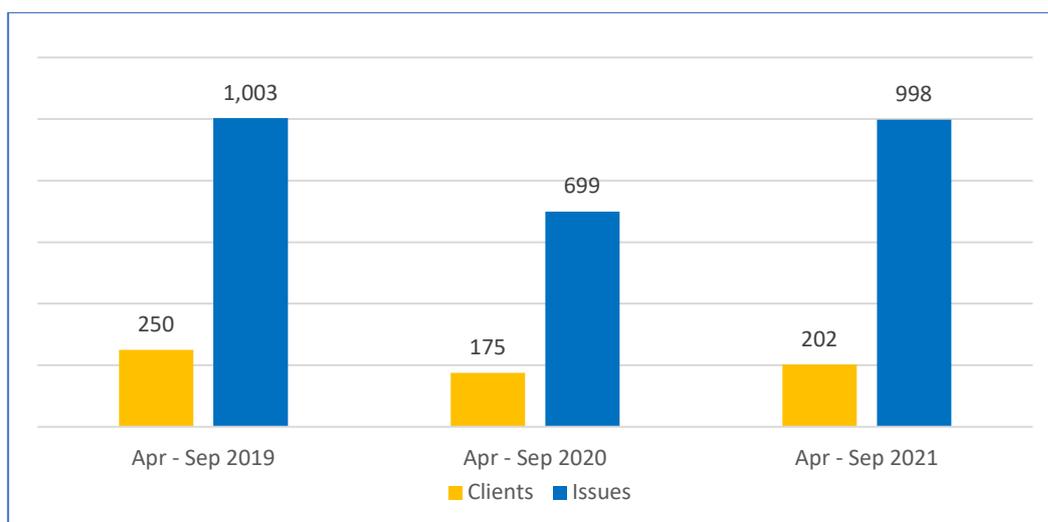
In addition to our online advice service and resources, we now offer access to an adviser 10am-4pm five days a week. Previously in Shepton Mallet, we offered a more limited service: 10am-1pm three days a week. Our ability to make advice more accessible, but with fewer advisers, has also meant that we are now reaching new demographics – more younger people and more people in-work are now accessing our services.

To better understand the impact of our change in advice delivery, we undertook a staff, volunteer and client (former and existing) survey and the responses were overwhelmingly positive.

The funding that SMTC provides has enabled us make changes to our service delivery over the past 18 months (e.g. purchasing IT equipment and online resources), as well as helping to maintain our core service, which is largely volunteer led with the support of a small paid staff team.

The simplest way to demonstrate our impact is visually, with a breakdown of key stats and data:

Clients and Issues



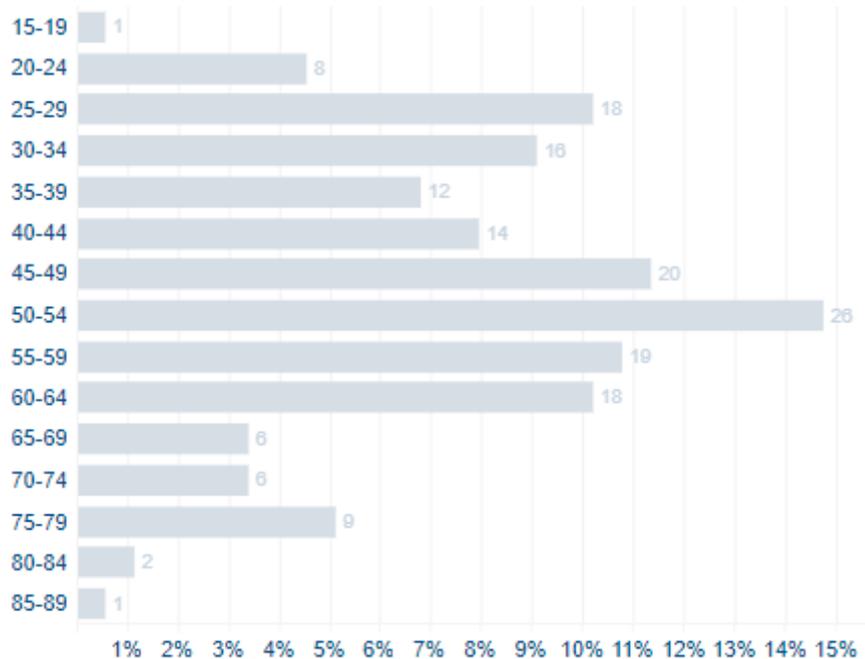
The increase in clients to pre-pandemic times levels the change in our service delivery - from a face-to-face drop in service three mornings a week, to a telephone and email service 10am to 4pm, five day a week. Our numbers are continuing to rise.

Issues

| | Issues | Clients |
|---------------------------------|------------|---------|
| Benefits & tax credits | 381 | 85 |
| Benefits Universal Credit | 109 | 46 |
| Consumer goods & services | 8 | 6 |
| Debt | 133 | 41 |
| Education | 2 | 2 |
| Employment | 59 | 25 |
| Financial services & capability | 28 | 16 |
| GVA & Hate Crime | 11 | 6 |
| Health & community care | 17 | 9 |
| Housing | 84 | 31 |
| Immigration & asylum | 11 | 7 |
| Legal | 38 | 22 |
| Other | 24 | 17 |
| Relationships & family | 52 | 31 |
| Tax | 10 | 7 |
| Travel & transport | 7 | 6 |
| Utilities & communications | 24 | 12 |
| Grand Total | 998 | |

Universal Credit and employment issues are now really common enquiries, reflecting the difficulties caused by the pandemic. Debt, housing and other benefits, however, remain consistently high.

Age



The age demographic of our clients has changed a little, in that we are now supporting more people under 35 and in the 45-59 age groups than in pre-pandemic times.

Disability / Long-term health



With the proliferation of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) application issues and appeals, we continue to see high levels of client with disabilities and long-term health issues.

Ward

| Local Authority Ward | Local Authority | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Shepton East | Mendip | 112 |
| Shepton West | Mendip | 90 |

Our Shepton clients are fairly evenly spread between the two wards – 55% East and 45% West.

The Future

We are retaining our main office and HQ at Highfield House in Shepton, but reducing the office space. Given that our main advice channels are now remote, we are going to set up new public access points for clients seeking advice. These are modelled on the current telephone and digital channels of online advice - a freephone Adviceline, a telephone call-back service, email advice and a third-party referral service.

To facilitate this, we're piloting touch-screen computers and telephones in our offices and partner agency premises, so that clients can access our services in a variety of ways. In addition to which, we'll continue to offer a face-to-face appointment for those clients that need one, and will roll-out new video consultations as a further option.

It's difficult to know what the longer-term impacts of Somerset's unitary authority changes will be on CAM from 2023, given our reliance on MDC for a quarter of our core funding. Any structural or governance decisions will always be made with the interests of our clients at the core, and always in consultation with our partners.

Ian Byworth, CEO
CA Mendip
13/12/21