

**citizens
advice**

**East Dorset
& Purbeck**



*Solving problems,
transforming lives*

Annual Review 2022-23

Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck

About Us

Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck is an independent charity that provides free, confidential and impartial advice and support. Our goal is to help local people find a way forward, whatever their problem.

We have offices in Wimborne and Wareham as well as outreach locations throughout East Dorset and Purbeck and are part of the Citizens Advice network in Dorset and across England and Wales.

Our Aims

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Our Principles

- Free
- Confidential
- Independent
- Impartial

Our Impact

- For every £1 invested in our service, we financially benefit the people we help by £8.05
- For every £1 invested in our service, we add £36.20 in public value



Chair of Trustees Report

It gives me great pleasure to introduce and commend the Annual Review of the activities of Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck which I hope you find interesting.

This is the second review of the two bodies who came together on the 1st April 2021 and it has been another challenging year coming out of the pandemic and facing a cost of living crisis, whilst continuing to be a key partner in Citizens Advice in Dorset (CAiD).



The Chief Officer's report covers in detail how the service has learnt from the past two years and adjusted its delivery to meet the increasing demands of the community and new challenges it faces. Additional funding has been achieved, allowing us to provide increased resources to further enhance the services we are able to offer to our community which have proved so vital in these difficult times. We have also worked very closely with Dorset Council in delivering and processing the Household Support Fund vouchers to the Dorset Council area, providing further much needed support to the community.

A significant amount of time was spent working closely with the other local offices through CAiD, to ensure that Citizens Advice in Dorset continues to speak with one voice. CAiD on behalf of the local offices was successful in winning the Dorset Council Advice, Guidance, and Information Services contract which started in October 2021 for an initial three years. The review meetings with Dorset Council have been upbeat and the number of clients being helped continues to rise.

A significant proportion of our income comes from Dorset Council, Parish and Town Councils as well as other organisations and a big thank you to them for their continuing support. A special thanks to John Rynne one of our Trustees who organises a number of jive nights throughout the year generating significant income for Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck.

The Trustees are very pleased that the high level of support we have been able to offer to the community has increased in line with the challenges the service has faced and I would like to say a very big thank you to all the staff and volunteers involved. I would personally like to thank all the Trustees for their support as we look forward together to addressing the challenges that the future will bring.

Alan Breakwell
Chair of Trustees

Chief Officer's Report



This past year has to some extent been a year of change and transition for us. We moved out of pandemic mode and back to some kind of 'normal.' We have not, however, just returned to our old ways of working. We have learned from the enforced changes of 2020 and 2021. We now have a wider range of ways that people can communicate and work with us, and we have more flexible working practices for volunteers. We believe that this provides more convenience for the people we help and our volunteers, resulting in more efficiency overall.

The cost-of-living crisis has dominated our advice delivery over the past year with our advisers delivering both frontline emergency support (helping people access food, energy and housing) as well as advising people on their overall financial capability i.e. looking for opportunities for individuals to reduce their outgoing costs and also maximise their income through benefits applications, and accessing local and national grants. The emotional toll on our advisers has been high at times, but we have been here for people, offering high-quality advice and compassion to those who are facing enormous challenges in their lives.

We regularly support people who are at rock bottom but the cost-of-living crisis has highlighted just how crucial our service is in supporting people in, or near, the point of crisis. Year on year, consistently higher results are achieved in terms of the number of people helped, the number of issues our staff and volunteers are presented with, and the amount of money generated back into the local economy as a result. What underlines these achievements is the fact that during the pandemic our volunteer numbers fell by two-thirds. Tireless efforts on the recruitment front have seen our volunteer numbers steadily increase yet we still need to continue with our drive to recruit more volunteers in order to improve our resources. Our volunteers (and our staff) are subjected to rigorous training all of which takes time. Whilst we can be very proud of the results we have achieved, we remain acutely aware that we are not meeting the demand for our services which is growing exponentially. To add to these pressures, the issues that people bring to us now are increasingly complex, taking more time to review, follow up and resolve.

We can all face problems that seem complicated, intimidating or unfair. At Citizens Advice, we believe no one should have to face these problems alone. When we say we are here for everyone, we mean it. No one else in the local area sees as many people with so many different kinds of problems. This gives us a unique insight into the challenges people are facing in our community. Our Business Plan priorities have a strong focus on supporting more people. Our vision is to provide help to our clients in the right place at the right time, through whichever channel suits them best. We're passionate about reaching everyone who needs our help. We cover a geographical area which includes many rural areas, we are aware of the particular issues affecting these communities and the need for our service in these areas is greater than before. We have responded by providing more outreach locations and launching our mobile Advice Bus.



We are in a strong position at the beginning of the new financial year to once again achieve our stretching ambitions. This can only happen, however, if we continue to get the financial support from our funders. Citizens Advice is at the frontline of this ongoing crisis and we need continued, ongoing support to ensure we are there for the people who turn to us for advice, guidance and reassurance. I am grateful to all of our funders for putting their trust in East Dorset and Purbeck Citizens Advice, enabling us to provide high-quality advice to the people who need it most in these continuing unprecedented times. I know that everyone working for us, in whatever capacity, will continue to work very hard to address local issues and concerns in the coming year. Recruiting and training more volunteers and continuing to explore ways that we can work even more efficiently, we can help the increasing numbers of people that come to us for help and support.

Helen Goldsack
Chief Officer

Service Report

During the start of the 2022/2023 financial year Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck continued to adapt to the challenges that had been posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns. Along with many other voluntary services, we struggled with a dip in volunteer numbers following the pandemic. This put a huge demand on our existing volunteers and had the potential to affect the range of services we could offer.



We were again needing to offer both drop-in and appointment services in multiple locations. It was therefore of huge benefit to us when we were able to advertise for two new full-time paid roles to support our core service. This was a significant step in us being able to return to and indeed improve our service offer to the public.

One of our new paid staff members was key in us being able to reopen outreaches in Upton where pre-pandemic we had a longstanding relationship with Lytchett Minster & Upton Council offering a drop-in service at the Town Hall offices. We were pleased that we were able to restart this service and offer not only a drop-in session but an additional session for booked appointments. We were also able to return to Upton Library offering a drop-in session once a week. This was a new location for us pre-pandemic and it was great that we were able to restart this.

The Ferndown Library outreach, like the offices in Wareham and Wimborne, continued to meet what has at times been very high demand as did the Lytchett Matravers Library drop-in held on Friday mornings. Our new drop-in service at Herston Village Hall in Swanage started life by offering one morning per month and soon became weekly, continuing to be well attended.

We looked for new and innovative ways to take our service to the vulnerable and rurally isolated and the Mobile Advice Bus, having completed a few trial runs earlier in the year, started a timetabled service at various locations throughout our area proving a great success.

A further boost to us in the provision of our core service is that we succeeded in successfully recruiting a law student who will start a placement with us in September 2023. Historically student placements have been a successful partnership for Citizens Advice with many students continuing to work with us once their placement ends and indeed, often taking up paid roles with us once they have obtained their degree.



Various issues caused spikes in activity such as the Council Tax Energy Rebate forms, high demand from those seeking help with their Household Support Fund applications and the deepening cost of living and housing crisis. Throughout this time, we have continued to forge links with partner services in a bid to offer a joined-up response to the issues people continue to face.

No one will be surprised to hear that we remain extremely busy across all areas of the work we do. We continue to adapt and add to the services we provide in an effort to meet a demand for our service.

This update reflects the resilience and adaptability of Citizens Advice as we navigate through the challenges of the post-pandemic period while continuing to provide essential services to the community. In light of the ongoing demand for our services, we remain extremely busy and are committed to adapting and expanding our services to meet this demand.

Judy Herring
Service Manager



East Dorset
& Purbeck

We Help Thousands of Local People Each Year

£ 27,519,459

Total public value

People with less problems are more content, productive and active in society. Our calculation of public value, also indicates the value of a volunteer service.

£ 6,119,651

Value to the people we've helped

We helped individual people to achieve financial outcomes including back-dated benefits, writing-off debt and refunds for customer issues.

£ 1,819,967

Fiscal value

Financial savings to local and national government due to fewer payments for out-of-work benefits, costly evictions, re-housing evicted tenants and less demand on the NHS.

Statistics from FY April 2022 - March 2023

*This includes people who applied for the Household Support Fund.



People
helped
11,956*



Issues
39,032

Top Issues



Charitable support &
food banks 18,213*



Benefits & Tax
Credits 6,881



Utilities & Comms
4,786



Consumer Goods &
Services 2,027



Housing 1,854



Debt 1,759

We are East Dorset and Purbeck Citizens Advice



41 Volunteers
including **10** Trustees
44 paid staff

Value of
volunteering for
Citizens Advice in
East Dorset and
Purbeck in 2022/23 is
£307,845



Volunteering has social benefits that can, improve mental health and well being. You will be able to make a difference to people's lives.

Energy Unit

Dorset & BCP

We've received a high number of requests for support from our energy unit this year – a result of the unstable energy market. The Government introduced the Energy Price Guarantee (EPG), however, households are still struggling to manage their energy costs.

We've experienced high demand for emergency pre-payment meter (PPM) vouchers to get households 'back on supply.' Our team continued to give practical energy advice and carbon monoxide awareness training whilst offering free CO monitors to people.

We've seen the number of energy issues increase and become more complex, which in turn takes longer to resolve. The energy advice we have been giving has constantly been reviewed with the changing markets and tailored to the household's needs and lifestyles, ensuring our advice is current. Added to this, many energy companies ceased trading during this time, which caused further stress and anxiety for households when trying to manage their energy costs.

Our Advisers have had access to emergency PPM vouchers, from our partners at the Fuel Bank Foundation and have been able to assist with applications for the Government's Household Support Fund and Surviving Winter Grants. We received funding for the Regional Lead and the Energy Champions for consumers again.

The Regional Lead offered Frontline Worker Training for professionals who engage with the general public, to give them a better understanding of the energy market and the extra support available to households. The Energy Champions attended events to speak to consumers directly offering simple energy advice. We attended events in Bridport, Ferndown, Wareham Quay and Swanage and hosted our own event in Ferndown for Fuel Poverty Awareness Day, which was extremely well supported and beneficial to the many people who attended. We increased the number of Surviving Winter grants that were given out to households across Dorset and BCP to 506. This has been made possible by the amazing fund raising support from Dorset Community Foundation, which enabled local Citizens Advice offices across Dorset & BCP Council areas to access the grants.

Ros Dignan
Project Coordinator

Energy Case Study

Kate's story*

Kate lived alone with her four children, one of whom was under five years old, in a three-bed house rented from a housing association. Kate suffered from various health conditions including fibromyalgia. Kate received Universal Credit and was being assessed for Work Capability Assessment, Child Benefit, Personal Independence Payment daily living element and child maintenance. She came to see us worried about her high energy costs. She had various debts and was receiving debt advice from the Debt Advice Agency.

We established that Kate was not on the Priority Services Register and that she believed her main heating system, an Air Source Heat Pump and solar panels was not working properly and she did not understand how to use it. When it was installed earlier in the year she was told the property needed new windows and doors but the housing association have not actioned this.

Kate was also unsure about whether she had the right amount of loft insulation. Kate had a standard pre-payment meter which she was topping up by £70 a week in the summer when no heating was being used.



How we helped

Kate was offered a benefit check and referred to a Citizens Advice specialist for more complex benefit issues. We provided Kate with some initial energy savings tips and referred her to LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership) for a free home visit, to help identify where Kate could reduce her energy costs further.

In addition, we advised Kate to talk to her housing association to request an engineer's visit to check the system and discuss how to use her heating system to reduce electric costs. We also advised her to write to the housing association to confirm the level of loft insulation and to follow up on replacement windows and doors.

Outcomes

We helped Kate to apply for the Warm Home Discount - **£150** credit.

Told Kate about the benefits of registering with the Priority Service register, providing a direct link for her to apply.

We told Kate about the cost of living payments she was eligible for, including:

£650 as a Universal Credit claimant

£150 as a PIP claimant

£400 credit through her energy supplier.

Housing, Moving On



It's been another busy year for the team and although we are still living with covid, we are now seeing people face to-face which has had a positive impact when providing support with housing issues.

As the cost of living crisis continues to bite, the rate of Section 21 evictions has risen alarmingly in the last year. New Government figures reveal the number of households living in privately rented homes in England who were evicted by bailiffs as a result of Section 21 proceedings increased by 143%* in a year.

Although this is a positive step, scrapping 'no fault' Section 21s doesn't do much to address the problem of ever increasing rents. All of the people we help are concerned about the cost of living crisis, rising prices including cost of food, petrol, utilities, and increasing rents, means that anxiety levels are increasing.

Private rent levels have risen way above the Local Housing Allowance and demand for rental properties is much higher than supply. In many cases, people are reporting that they are struggling to view properties due to the high number of enquiries letting agents and landlords receive.

We continue to provide support when applying for the housing register and homelessness through Dorset Council. There is currently a 20 week wait to be banded and to apply for accommodation. We work closely with the housing team, which has worked really well and has enabled us to continue to build upon our great relationship with Dorset Council which will ultimately benefit the people we help.

Jacqui Few
Housing Specialist

Housing Case Study

Derek's story*

Derek is a single man aged 64 who lived in a caravan in a residential park until the owners changed it to a non-residential site, and he opted to sell his caravan. Derek was living off his savings and sleeping in his car until he had no funds left and was placed in emergency temporary accommodation by the local council.

Derek struggles to read or write and is dyslexic. He has health conditions, including diabetes, and wasn't registered for Universal Credit. The project team supported Derek with a housing register and homeless application and helped him to submit a claim for the benefits he was entitled to.

The housing application was successful and Derek was allocated an older persons studio flat. He didn't have the funds to pay his first month's rent in advance, so the project team organised an advance payment with the relevant organisations to secure his tenancy to ensure Derek wasn't in breach of it from the offset.



The project team contacted a local charity who offered to help him move in. Derek had no furniture or white goods, and Citizens Advice obtained grants from local charities to furnish his new home.

Derek doesn't have a support network, so Citizen's Advice obtained practical, financial and administrative help from various local charities and dedicated volunteers to help Derek settle into his new home and access all the essential services. We continued supporting Derek throughout the process until all his benefits were in place.

How we helped

At present, Citizens Advice is acting on Derek's behalf to appeal the decision reached for Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity and Personal Independence Payments, which could result in further potential financial gains.

Derek has been extremely grateful for the support he has received from the project team and is incredibly happy in his new home.

Financial outcomes

Council Tax Support. 52 weekly payments of **£20.75**.

The total annual amount is **£1,079.00**

Universal Credit - Housing Element, 12 monthly payments of **£490.90**,

The total annual amount is **£5,890.80**

Total outcomes
£8319.80

Grants

Age UK £200.00

Dorset Household Support Fund (x3) **£200.00**

Dorset Reclaim Grant for basic furniture and home essentials **£400.00**

Emergency Local Assistance vouchers for white goods **£490.00**

Local charity donation **£60.00**

Spotlight on



At Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck, individuals choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some are drawn by the sense of togetherness working in a team, others appreciate the mental stimulation that volunteering provides, and many find fulfilment in giving back to the community. Our volunteers, hailing from diverse backgrounds, share a common passion for aiding others and possess a wealth of knowledge.

Our commitment is to cultivate an inclusive work environment where authenticity is celebrated, and everyone feels a sense of belonging. Our Advisers undergo comprehensive training, empowering them to assist with a broad spectrum of issues, whether in-person, over the phone, or via email. With offices situated in Wareham and Wimborne, as well as various outreach locations and just started this year, our Advice Bus, we have extended our services to reach as many individuals as possible.

The demand for our services has remained consistently high and is rising, given the concerns about the escalating cost of living. Consequently, we are in need of additional volunteers. The expanding digital landscape has posed challenges for those unable to navigate the internet for information or complete essential applications. Our team consists of over 40 volunteers, including dedicated trustees overseeing our operations. We deeply appreciate their hard work and selflessness in dedicating their time to support others.

Volunteering not only contributes to mental well-being but also offers a genuine sense of purpose and accomplishment. Plus, we always have free tea and biscuits on hand! We wholeheartedly welcome new members to our team.

Interested in volunteering with us?

For more information, feel free to reach out to sue.bristow@edpcitizensadvice.org.uk or visit our website www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk where there is more information about the types of volunteer roles available.

Sue Bristow
Advice Development Manager

Spotlight on



It's been a year of beginning to carve out a path for the newly formed Income Generation team. Set up in November 2022, the small team of staff and trustees have worked hard to pursue new approaches to funding. We have had some successes with the creation of new donations and legacy leaflets which have been distributed locally and with the production of our stakeholder leaflet, used at the launch of our Advice Bus this year.

The bus has seen its own success by way of a crowdfunding appeal, which raised just over £12,000 and we would like to thank everyone who shared and supported this appeal.



We are working hard to foster relationships with those who are locally supportive of our work. We planned a Garden Party for the summer in the grounds of our patron Viscount Cranborne's house. We are very grateful to Viscount & Viscountess Cranborne for hosting the Garden Party. We move into 2023/24 full of plans to expand our work and pursue new opportunities as we continue to find different avenues of funding.

For more information about funding opportunities please contact katrina.ford@edpcitizensadvice.org.uk

Katrina Ford
Business Development Manager

Spotlight on



Research & Campaigns

Conducting research and undertaking campaigns is an essential part of the work we do both nationally and locally. The years following covid appear to have brought with them many different challenges that have been further impacted by world events.

Our Advisers help people with the problems that they face, often at times when they are suffering crises. The work we do gives us a unique insight into these issues. We are able to use this knowledge to focus our campaigning and research on the issues that are affecting them. The highest number of issues we see invariably include benefits, housing and debt and this has only worsened post covid.

Whilst housing is a national issue, we are conducting our own research into the lack of affordable housing in our area. From our research it is clear that in rural areas particularly, the availability of housing is sparse and unaffordable to most residents. We are continuing with this work as a local office as well as contributing to Dorset wide and national Citizens Advice work. We continue to influence with other Research & Campaign work using the media, social media and through contact with our local MPs.

Judy Herring
Service Manager

Spotlight on



In April 2022 the dedicated Household Support Fund (HSF) team at Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck continued working in partnership with Dorset Council to administer the DWP funded Household Support Fund (HSF). The fund was designed to support low income households across the Dorset Council area, providing short term financial assistance to vulnerable people living within our community whilst helping to provide a sense of security around affording household essentials.



Household Support Fund

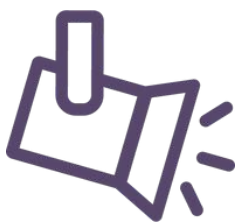
Two rounds were completed over the course of the year and both consisted of a £200 supermarket voucher being issued to those residents who met the relevant eligibility criteria. The team administered applications from pensioners in the first round and this was later extended to include non-pensioners.

A total of **£406,800** (2,034 supermarket vouchers) was issued in the first round during April to September.

An additional round ran between November to March when a total of **£650,800** (3254 vouchers) was issued to those who needed financial assistance over the winter months.

Judy Herring
Service Manager

Spotlight on



Communications

Increased demand for our services is due to more people needing help, an ongoing priority has been to communicate to local residents about access to our services. We have used our social media platforms to do this, whilst using marketing material to promote different locations. We also worked closely with Town and Parish Councils to ensure that they receive service updates to share with local residents.

The impact of the continued cost-of-living crisis is felt by many, and we worked with different support organisations to ensure available help was communicated. This included working with Dorset Council to help communicate the Household Support Fund to residents whilst ensuring that the on-line application process was straightforward and easy to use. We also worked with Dorset Community Foundation promoting their very successful Surviving Winter campaign.

We continued to communicate with our stakeholders with our quarterly Stakeholder Report. This is a summary of the service we provide, including the number of people we've helped, the type of issues, together with challenges faced by our community and us as a charity. As an independent charity, we are reliant upon grants and donations to be able to continue to run the service. The purpose of the newly-formed Income Generation team is to generate additional income and to create awareness of our services. The team created a stakeholder leaflet which has been used at different events that we've attended, together with a donation leaflet which has been distributed locally. The early planning stages of a legacy leaflet took place during this time, with a view to communicating to local residents the importance of leaving a legacy to a local charity and how this can benefit vulnerable people.

Internal communications have been essential in ensuring all staff and volunteers are kept up to date with important information. Our internal portal is used to post weekly briefings, updates and training.

We worked closely with Research & Campaigns on key national campaigns including Scams Awareness, National Consumer Week and the Big Energy Saving Winter campaign. Press releases were sent to the local media and messaging was shared on our social media platforms. We also liaised with local MPs about the cost-of-living crisis and called for energy suppliers to stop forcing people onto prepayment meters.

During this year, we were also involved in the early planning stages of getting our Advice Bus on the road. We helped promote the Aviva Crowdfunding campaign which helped secure funding for the bus. Comms were also involved in branding the Advice Bus ensuring our logo and corporate messaging is correct.

Communications...

Media coverage was generated across a range of mediums including BBC Radio Solent, Greatest Hits Radio Dorset, Wave 105FM, Forest FM, Dorset Echo, Dorset BizNews and The Stour and Avon, together with local Town and Council Parish magazines.

Communications will continue to be essential as we move forward, whether this is communicating campaigns and key messages or informing residents how they can access our services. It is increasingly important that local, vulnerable residents know we're here and that help is available.

Sian Smith
Communication Officer

Friends Fundraising

Fundraising activities that have been organised via Friends of Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck include the ever-popular Jive Nights at The Pavilion, Bournemouth. These are organised by Friends member and EDP Trustee, John Rynne, and have raised over £2500 for Citizens Advice.

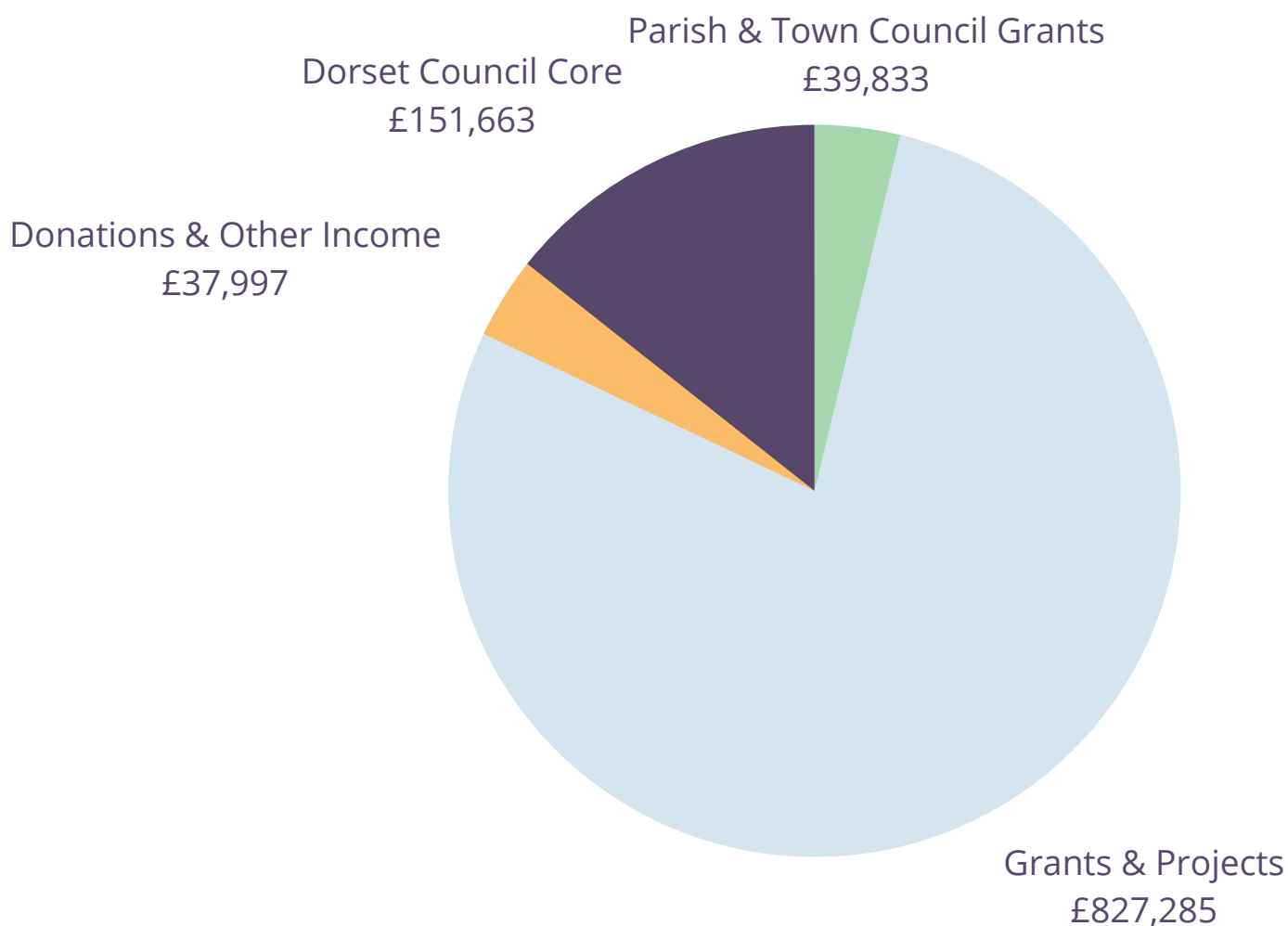
For the first time since covid, we were able to return to the Wimborne St Giles Teas in August which is a charity fundraising event where volunteers provide cakes and help on the day, with all profits going to Citizens Advice. Again, a big thank you to John Rynne who coordinated this and to all of the cake makers and helpers. This event raised £660 for Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck.



If you're interested in supporting our fundraising activities, please get in touch.

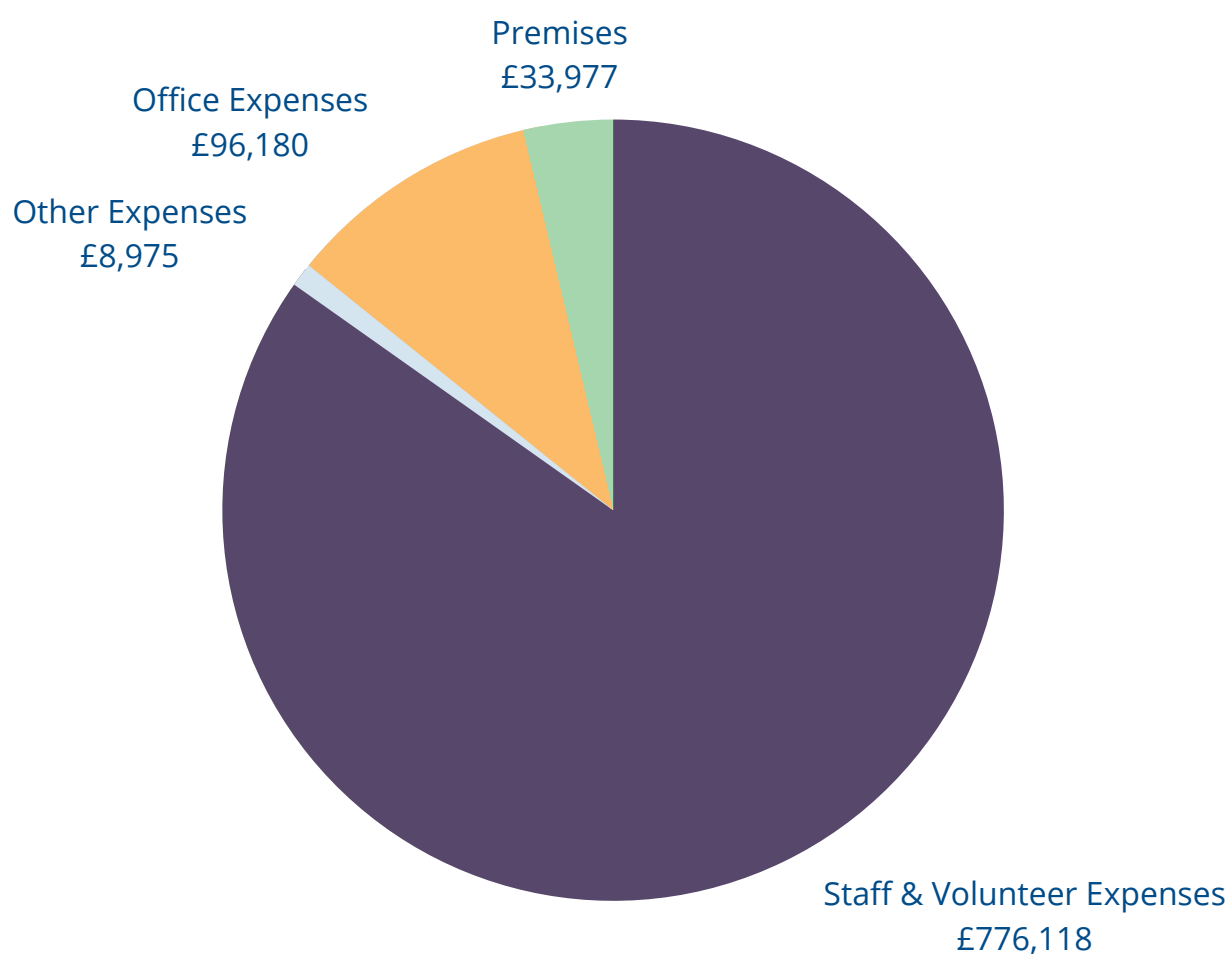
Funding We've Received

Total Income **£ 1,056,778**



How Your Funding Helped

Total Expenditure £ 915,250



Your funding helped us to deliver our general advice service, including:

- Increase our rural outreach
- Provide home visits
- Recruit more volunteers
- Maintain and improve our offices in Wareham and Wimborne

How We've Made a Difference

“My experience with Citizens Advice has been so good and my debt adviser has been amazing.”

**citizens
advice**

"You are my heroes. I have a chronic illness and for the last 6yrs your staff have supported me when there was no one else."

"I can't praise your service enough. You give hope to the helpless."



“I have found this service invaluable for advice and moral support when things in my life were unravelling and I didn't have the emotional stability or knowledge necessary to deal with the situation.”

“Thank you for all that advice and signposting. I'm indebted to you. And thank you for pursuing contacting me as it has been a very busy and difficult time”

"My first visit was so supportive and helpful, that I left my appointment full of hope and able to face the future."

"The adviser was a lifeline at a time of extreme anxiety, thank you."

“First class advice and service. Without the help we would have been at a loss financially and facing stress and anxiety.”

**citizens
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**East Dorset
& Purbeck**



@CitAdviceEdp

www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk

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