

Citizens Advice in South Holland sees a significant increase in requests for advice.

In the nine months since the first lockdown started, Citizens Advice in South Holland has seen the number of people seeking advice jump by a third over the comparable period in the previous year, from 2406 to 3155. This is despite the organisation having to close its offices and outreaches, and move to online and telephone service.

By far the biggest leap related to questions about Universal Credit, about which inquiries doubled, and within that jump, there was a 72% increase in questions about making an initial claim. Separately, questions about employment also jumped by 41%, from 844 to 1192, underlining the massive effect the pandemic is having on peoples working lives.

There was still a broad range of issues being raised - covering questions such as housing, consumer matters, relationships, health and immigration, in addition to the main two concerns of debt and benefits, - Citizens Advice is well placed to deal with such a wide range of issues.

The average age of people seeking advice has reduced overall compared with the previous year, with a drop off in enquiries from older people, and an increase in those of working age, which ties in with the leap in concerns about Universal Credit and employment issues.

Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire is also supporting the national campaign to urge the government not to drop the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift, and warns that local families could be pushed into further hardship if the uplift ends as planned in April.

Chief Officer Simon Richards said “We support people every day whose lives have been turned upside down by this pandemic. Given that we were unable to continue face to face service past the 23rd March, it was particularly welcome to see that we were able to increase the number of clients helped. It is clear that our services are needed as much as ever right now, and will continue to be needed even more in the future “

Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire can be contacted on the freephone Adviceline which is open **Monday to Friday 09.00am-4.00pm** on **0808 2787996**. Details on how to access advice online can be found at <https://www.citizensadvice-southlincs.org.uk/>