

April 2021



Spotlight



On Research and Campaigns

Hello and welcome to another issue of Spotlight.

It continues to be a busy and challenging time for Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire, helping our communities through the latest lockdown. We continue to assist thousands of people with a range of problems. We have highlighted some of the employment issues that people have faced due to Covid-19. These problems will remain with us in the coming months and it is more important than ever that people can access our high quality services.

We are committed to preventative work, helping to address issues before they become problems. Please do get involved with our Fuel Poverty event in May, looking at ways we can help people to heat their homes in the winter.

Thank you to all those who promoted or completed our scams survey. The results are both shocking and unsurprising. They really help to give us a picture of what is happening and will help to inform our future campaigning work around scams.

Our services remain accessible by telephone and we will be looking at opening our offices for face-to-face services in the coming months, ensuring that we can reach all those that need our help.

Thank you for your support.

Please do get in touch if you have any questions, comments or ideas for future work.

Simon Richards

Chief Officer

Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire



Employment in a time of Covid-19.

(Peter)

Covid-19 has brought difficult times for employers and employees. Although the majority of employees are being treated fairly, we have had reports from our clients who have suffered loss of income or been put at risk at work.

- A client who is an agency care worker was sent out on a visit without being informed that the patient had Covid-19. The client then caught the virus and had to isolate. The agency wrongly refused the client Statutory Sick Pay.
- A client employed by a charity normally would be involved in face-to-face consultations. However, during lockdown, he has been working from home, using his own laptop computer. When the laptop developed a fault, his employer would not fund the repair.
- An Adviceline client was refused Statutory Sick Pay during a 10-day isolation period after contact with someone with a positive Covid-19 test. The employer said the client was not entitled to sick pay as she earns too little. In fact, the client earns above the £120 per week limit.
- A client working in a shop reported that the company rigidly enforced mask wearing among the employees, even if they had an exemption. However, customers were never turned away even if they refused to wear a mask. The client and other workers are concerned about the implications for their health.
- A client's husband was advised by his GP not to work due to serious health issues. The client was wrongly told by the agency he works for that they would not pay Statutory Sick Pay, which is causing hardship for the family.
- A client from the Spalding area contacted the migrant helpline. The firm he works for have sent out a letter to employees expressing concern about high levels of absences during the Covid-19 crisis. They are proposing changing the rules for Company Sick Pay, with more unpaid waiting days. The company are also offering rewards for 100% attendance. The client is concerned that these changes will reduce adherence to rules about isolation.
- Several clients have found that they are struggling financially on furlough, even when they receive the full 80% of pay. One client said he was behind with household bills and that his overdraft was steadily increasing.
- A 40-year-old client was made redundant at short notice after working for a company for 10 years. He feels annoyed that there was no proper consultation or discussion before he received his notice. The client believes that finding another job will be challenging at this moment.



We will continue to monitor our clients' problems at work and our Evidence Forms will enable Citizens Advice to campaign. Workers find it difficult to self-isolate when necessary if they are left with inadequate income or feel that their future employment will be threatened. This potentially makes controlling the virus more difficult.

Helping Alleviate Fuel Poverty in South Lincolnshire: Zoom Event May 12th 4 pm 2021.

(Juliet)

Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire, together with Utilita Energy and National Energy Action, are championing a Zoom event focusing on 'Helping Alleviate Fuel Poverty in South Lincolnshire'.



We welcome anyone who represents a local charity or partner group, or who is a local or parish councillor. If you are interested in helping us raise the profile of fuel poverty in the area and would like to attend, please contact us at randc2@citizensadvicesouthlincs.org.uk

Our work during this winter has highlighted the fact that many clients struggled with heating costs, often as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also highlighted the fact that local support can be a great boon to those in need. However, at a time when social restrictions were in operation because of the Covid-19 pandemic, support from the organisations who customarily provide it was sometimes difficult to access.

We want to be able to help more of those who are struggling with the costs of heating their homes. We want them to know what support is available and be able to access it more easily in preparation for next winter. No family should have to choose between food and fuel if they are having difficulty with their finances. No family should have to face stress or compromise their physical and mental well-being by deciding to do without and go cold.

'Helping Alleviate Fuel Poverty in South Lincolnshire' is taking place during May – early in 2021 – because we know that this will help us make good, sound preparations to help those in need for the forthcoming winter. The event will host speakers from National Energy Action and national Citizens Advice as well as those from our local areas. It will also provide the opportunity for organisations to discuss fuel support issues and prospective solutions.



The event takes place on Wednesday May 12th at 4pm. If you are interested in supporting this initiative and would like to attend, please contact randc2@citizensadvicesouthlincs.org.uk

Research and Campaigns Scams Survey: Results and Discussion

(Sean)

At the start of 2021, the Research & Campaigns team began a four-week project to aim to understand how pervasive scams had been since the start of Lockdown on 23rd March 2020. We were keen to discover whether there was significant commonality in how often people were being approached by scammers and whether they were aware that they were being scammed.

We compiled a simple, 11 question, online survey and shared it on our social media for people from any location in the UK to fill in.



The key results of our findings are presented below.

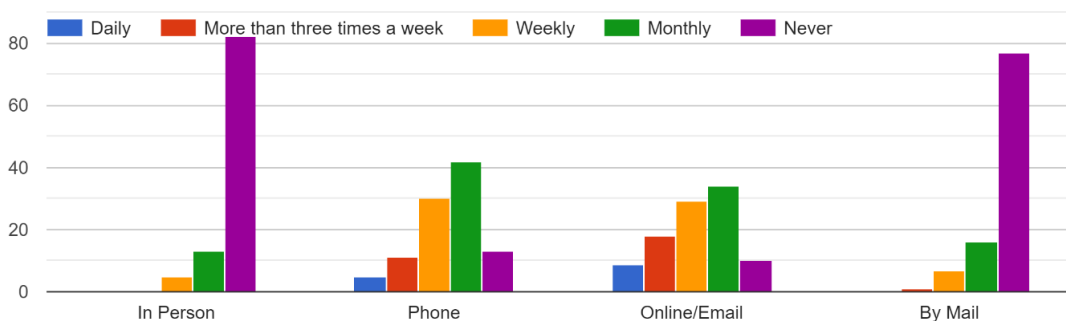
Major factors.

A total of 100 surveys were completed between 23rd February 2021 and 23rd March 2021. Respondents mainly lived in towns and villages, 52% and 26% respectively.

Almost half, 46%, of all respondents reported that they had been approached by scammers 'often'.

The table below shows how our cohort was approached. Very few scams resulted from 'traditional' mail and postal contacts and far more from landline and online contacts.

2. If you were approached by scammers, please select how often according to the categories below.



There was a variety of scams that our respondents reported being approached about. These included HMRC scams, scams related to streaming services and bank services scams.

83% of our respondents reported that they were usually aware when an approach was a scam.

A significant number of people, 68%, did not report scams to a professional body. However, 62.5% of people were more inclined to share information about scams with friends and family. Raising awareness and helping keep people safe, especially the vulnerable, were cited as primary reasons for telling friends and family.

92% of respondents had not lost money to a scam. Yet, the 8% who reported losing money lost varying individual amounts up to £3,000.

Conclusions.

These trends mirror some of the expectations that we had about scams during lockdown. We knew, for instance, that certain landline and online scams had risen in frequency and that, often, people do not report scams to professional bodies.

However, the tendency to discuss scams with friends and family may now indicate that some of the stigma around scams and being scammed is beginning to lift. Hopefully, this helps validate the importance of scams awareness work that organisations, such as Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire, do on a regular basis.



The survey has also indicated further areas of potential research in the future.

- How easily were people able to get their money back after being scammed?
- What makes people uncertain about whether something is a scam?
- What makes some people more likely than others to be scammed?

Festival of Social Justice Showcase

(Juliet and Amelia)

This year, we have taken the opportunity to get involved with the Festival of Social Justice Showcase on **Sunday 23rd May 2021**. The showcase – now a ‘virtual’ one – is hosted by the Stamford branch of Amnesty International and is part of a two-week Festival of Social Justice.

The aim of the festival is to showcase what is being done both locally and globally to support and further social justice.

The event has enabled us to provide our own Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire video focusing on what we do, why we volunteer and what our work achieves. This video will be combined with those from other allied groups to ‘showcase’ the work of groups in our area.

As always, we enjoyed the chance to remind ourselves – and to tell other people – why we joined Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire and what our advice service and our research and campaigns work achieve.

The video is due to be released in May. A link to view this will be provided in the next edition of Spotlight.

Support for Carers

(Nick)

Figures from CarersUK suggested that pre-2020 there were an estimated 9 million unpaid carers in the UK and that an extra 4.5 million people in the UK have become unpaid carers as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Typically, these additional carers will have been supporting loved ones from afar, helping with food shopping, collecting medicine, managing finances and providing reassurance and emotional support during the pandemic.



Some, along with many of the 9 million already caring for family members or friends will have taken on intense caring roles, helping with tasks such as personal care, moving around the home, administering medication and preparing meals.

Resources and information for carers is available at both a national level and local level. National charities such as Carers Trust and CarersUK both have excellent websites packed with resources and links to further help in your local area.

<https://www.carersuk.org/>

<https://carers.org/>

In Lincolnshire, resources and assistance for Carers is provided by the Lincolnshire Carers Service at Lincs County Council. This team works in partnership with CarersFirst and Connect to Support Lincs to provide practical help with anything from carers assessments and access to benefits to arranging for a break from caring or finding a local support group.

<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/support-carers>

<https://www.carersfirst.org.uk/lincolnshire>

<https://lincolnshire.connecttosupport.org/carers/>

Support can also be obtained from charities such as In-Control, Age UK, Dementia UK, Mencap and many others, and also from the NHS via local hospital trusts.

<https://in-control.org.uk/>

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/helping-a-loved-one/>

<https://www.dementiauk.org/get-support/looking-after-yourself-as-a-carer/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support>

<https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/contact-us/support/carers-support>



Many of these charities are actively involved in Carers Week, an annual event which aims to raise awareness of carers and their needs and to raise visibility of carers in the wider population via politicians, media and campaigns. This year Carers Week runs from 7th - 13th June 2021. See <https://www.carersweek.org/> or <https://www.facebook.com/carersweek/> for more information.

Privately Rented Homes Update

(Peter)

The following is part of a press release issued by Citizens Advice late in March:

Citizens Advice now helping one renter every minute as eviction ban just “papering over the cracks”



New research by Citizens Advice shows the charity is now helping one person every minute with problems relating to renting from a private landlord.

In the first two months of this year, the charity saw a 40% increase in people seeking one-to-one advice on issues relating to the private rented sector compared to the same period in 2020.

The government announced a ban on most eviction proceedings. That ban was extended several times and is in place until May 31. However, its conditions have been altered so tenants with more than six months rent outstanding can now be served with an eviction notice. This includes people who have built up arrears during the pandemic.

Polling by Citizens Advice, through its national Tenants’ Voice panel, shows private renters are still concerned by the threat of eviction despite the ban. A third said they had been worried about the issue in the last three months.

Figures from the charity’s website show in the first two months of the year 69,000 people viewed its advice pages dealing with problems related to private tenancies.

Citizens Advice also helped 16,530 people with one-to-one advice on these issues in the same two-month period. That is one every minute during office hours. This includes:

- *4,781 (29%) who had problems with repairs or maintenance*
- *1,541 (9%) who were worried about possession action not related to rent arrears*
- *848 (5%) who reported harassment by their landlord*
- *670 (4%) who wanted help with a possible illegal eviction.*

The Tenants’ Voice panel also found two thirds of those surveyed had experienced problems with maintenance or disrepair in the last three months.

These findings are in line with our Evidence Forms, in which the greatest number of problems reported concerned lack of repairs or long delays in putting things right. Clients report cases of serious mould on the walls due to dampness as well as slow responses to fixing problems with heating systems during the winter. We have had several reports of clients being turned away by estate agents and landlords because they are benefit claimants, making renting extremely difficult in such cases. Several students forced to stay at home rather than travel to their university complain of landlords strictly enforcing tenancy agreements despite them not being able to use the accommodation.



Find us on Social Media.

(Sean).

Our social media audience continues to increase. We are now followed by close to 690 people/organisations on Twitter, while our Facebook page has a total of 98 likes and over 100 follows.

In addition to this, our Facebook and Twitter are still important in sharing information about developing Research and Campaigns issues. We consistently release 'against scams' bulletins and have recently concluded our scams survey.



We reached a record breaking 18,700 people on Twitter in January, and have shared varied content, ranging from promotional material for staff/volunteer roles to more video content. You do not need to have an account to see either our Twitter or Facebook pages. They can both be accessed at www.citizensadviceSouthLincolnshire.org.uk by clicking on the speech bubbles in the 'connect with us' box on the website home page.



Social Media continues to be a driving force behind visits to our website. Our social media accounts lead to over 300 website visits during March. The 'EU Settlement Scheme' page was again one of the most frequently visited pages -376 visits-up from 183 visits when it appeared in the top three of most visited pages two months ago. This possibly indicates the sustained efforts of our marketing. There was also an increase in number of people visiting the website (+17%) and page views (+8%) compared to February.

Evidence forms January-March 2021.

These are forms filled in, electronically, by our assessors/advisers after interviewing any client who comes to us with an issue of unfairness. The forms are monitored both by the CASL Research and Campaigns team and by national Citizens Advice. The issues are in order of number of Evidence Forms received.

Type	Number
Universal Credit	49
Housing	35
Immigration	29
Consumer	25
Employment	24
Benefits	17
Debt	16
Utilities	9
Finance	4
Legal	4
Travel	4
Other	4
Discrimination	1
Education	1
Relationships	1
Tax	0
Health	0
Total	223

Contact us.

We hope you found this edition of Spotlight of interest. If you wish to contact the Research & Campaigns team with questions or comments, please use the email, randc2@citizensadviceSouthlincs.org.uk.

Members of our team will be pleased to give presentations, about scams awareness or energy saving to groups in the area, when this becomes possible. Just use the email address above for enquiries.

Juliet