

December 2022



Spotlight



## On Research and Campaigns

### Greetings from our New Team Leader

*"Hello, my name is Mary, and I am the Research and Campaigns Team Lead" was honestly a sentence I did not think I would be saying when I re-joined Citizens Advice in March this year.*

*I started volunteering with the service this spring as I decided to take a step back from paid employment and start doing what I loved most – helping people. I was fortunate enough to volunteer with Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire in 2018 so I knew what it was like to be in an advisory role. I thoroughly enjoy the experience of advising clients once again and – despite all the new things I need to learn – I have comfortably fallen back into the swing of things.*

*Research and Campaigns, however, was completely new to me. I did not engage with that side of the service when I previously volunteered with CASL. I pretty much did the advisory part and frequently forgot to fill in evidence forms (my sincerest apologies). Therefore, it was not until I joined this team that I realised just how important the work they do is. It was more than just collating data for reports and feedback to senior management or the trustees. The team is dedicated to campaigning on behalf of clients when it is clear a problem is not going away. For example, campaigning to reduce the wait time of receiving your first Universal Credit payment or working with legal clinics to ensure clients can access legal advice.*

*Therefore, when the option became available to become the Team Lead, I pretty much jumped at the chance. Prior to this, I had little experience in leading a team, but I knew I would be always supported by staff and volunteers which gave me the confidence to give it a go. I have been team lead since August, and I have no regrets. I have learnt so much about engaging with external stakeholders; remaining focused on how our work fits in with the wider CASL and the importance of actively listening to what your team is saying. It has been a privilege step into this role, and I am excited for what the coming year will bring.*

*Thank you to everyone who takes time to read our Spotlight newsletters. Thank you to all of our stakeholders for collaborating with us. And of course, thank you to all the volunteers and staff who support clients on the front line or behind the scenes. I wish you all a very merry Christmas and I will see you in the New Year.*

*Best wishes,*

*Mary*

## Coping with the cost of heating homes.

(Peter)

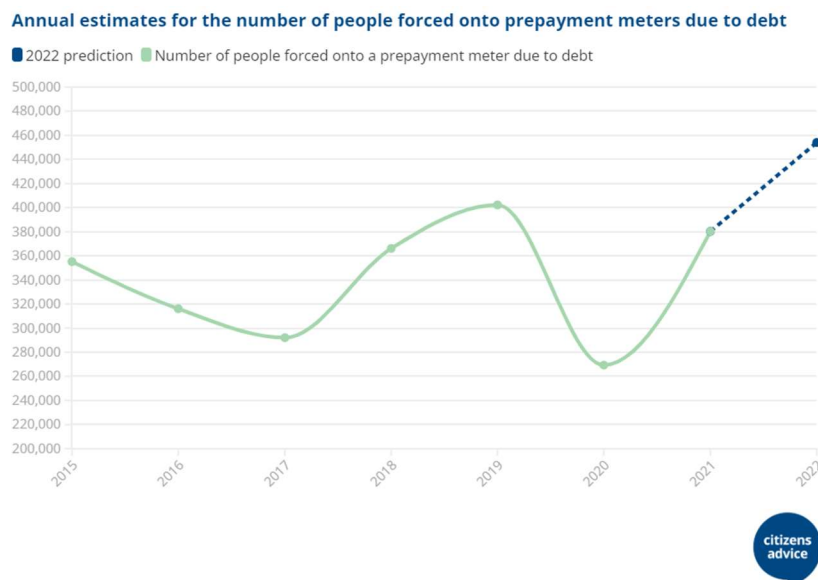
People are defined as living in fuel poverty if 10% or more of their household income is spent on energy costs. Many in our area are struggling to pay their energy bills or adequately heat their home. According to the National Energy Action (NEA) in the CASL area 13.7% of the population of South Holland are in fuel poverty and 12.5% in South Kesteven. **That is 6025 households in South Kesteven and 6283 in South Holland.** The national average is 13.4% of people.

Adam Scorer, chief executive of National Energy Action (NEA), says:

*“This winter has already been bleak and next year is set to be even worse. With Government support being reduced and energy bills spiralling yet again in April, one in three households will be in fuel poverty. That means many of them will be forced to bed wearing coats, rationing showers, and hot water, it means running up huge debts or self-disconnecting and going cold. Millions of the most vulnerable – carers, people with disabilities, those on low incomes and living in inefficient homes – are already bearing the brunt this winter. The situation will continue to get worse next year. The effects of this are devastating on both physical and mental health. Make no mistake, cold homes can kill. Government intervention must prioritise the most vulnerable in 2023 and beyond.”*



Citizens Advice report concerns that many households that cannot afford their energy bills will be forced into having a pre-payment meter. The graph below shows the trend and how it is predicted to develop.



The problems with pre-payment meters are that the charges can be higher if the meter is set to recover an energy debt and that self-disconnection is a constant threat when there are no funds for a top-up.

With a high percentage of the population in fuel poverty in our area, we have already had a high number of enquiries about coping with the increased cost of energy. With colder weather forecast, we can expect to hear from more clients that need help and advice. We have received funding to provide energy advice to clients. Until the end of this year, we can also issue vouchers to clients with top-up meters in danger of disconnection due to insufficient funds.

Some reports from Evidence Forms:

- A local client, who is a customer of Scottish Power, has not been receiving his monthly £66 Energy Bills Support Scheme Vouchers from the company. These vouchers are a government grant to pre-payment meter users. The client is disabled and lives on benefit income, so unable to keep his meters topped up. Citizens Advice issued him with vouchers to top up his meter while the problem was being resolved.
- A disabled client from the Grantham area struggles on benefit income. Even though she gets the Energy Bills Support Vouchers she still cannot afford to keep her meters topped up. CASL helped her out with fuel vouchers.
- A single mother living in a council rented bungalow locally said that the house was very expensive to heat. She said that there was little insulation and that she was struggling to keep topping up the prepayment meter. CASL were able to help her out with fuel vouchers, but this would only help her in the short term.
- A client from the Grantham area said that she was receiving alarmingly high bills from British Gas. She asked the company to check her meter was functioning correctly. British Gas have failed to take any action.
- A disabled client was switched to British Gas when her energy company ceased trading. She encountered problems setting up a new Direct Debit as the advice from British Gas was confusing. She ended up with a debt of £900 which she lacks the funds to pay. She is receiving help from a member of our debt team.
- We have spoken to clients living in more rural parts of the county who are off the gas grid. They rely on oil for heating and hot water. Usually a minimum delivery costs £500 or more, making this a huge expense for those on benefit income. The government have provided £100 subsidy, but the clients have still not been able to afford the top up therefore effectively cutting off their heat and hot water. In some cases, CASL advisers have been able to help the clients apply for charitable grants. One client said he buys small quantities of oil from his local filling station, but that this is a costly and inconvenient option.



## Local data about client issues.

(Sean)

The data for the last 3 months confirms the high anxiety among our clients about cost of living issues. We have helped clients apply for help that is available including to food banks in the area. Problems with affording gas and electricity also feature high in the list as well as debt.

PIP enquiries are high since we have had many reports from clients, disappointed at being told that they were refused an award. We have been helping with Mandatory Reconsiderations and appeals.

### Cost of Living Dashboard Topline figures

South Holland

South Kesteven

Next >

#### Top 5 cost of living issues

In the last three months the top 5 cost of living issues that clients saw us about in this Local Authority were:

Charitable support & Food Banks

257

Personal independence payment

195

Energy

183

Debt Assessment

131

Financial capability

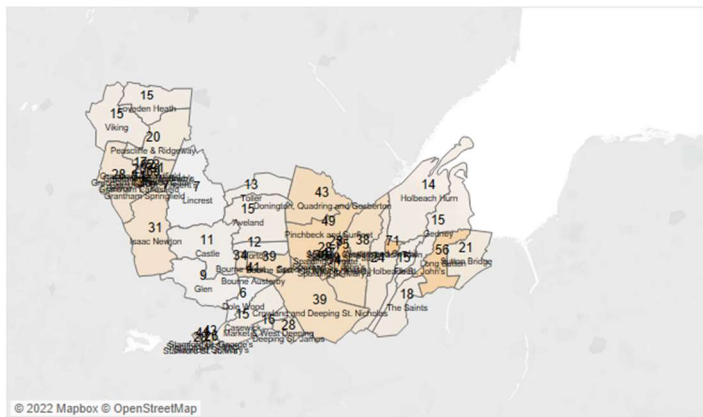
107

#### All cost of living issues by ward

Click icons above to see the selected issue by ward, click wards to see issues or click the name the top 5 table to filter the report. Click the same item again to reset the view.

Clients

6 84



© 2022 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Click the home icon on the map to recentre the view

As clients can be helped on more than one issue, manually summing numbers will be greater than the unique counts shown on the map. Click the home icon on the map to recentre the view

#### Top issues - latest 3 months to previous year

Top 5	Cost of Living Issues	Latest 3 Months	3 Months Last year	Change	% Change
1	Charitable support & Food Banks	257	151	106	70%
2	Personal independence payment	195	177	18	10%
3	Energy	183	59	124	210%
4	Debt Assessment	131	99	32	32%
5	Financial capability	107	109	-2	-2%
Total of all Clients with a COL issue		865	636	229	36%

The total is for all clients with any cost of living issue, not just the Top 5

## What Citizens Advice is saying: Parcel firms still failing to deliver in Citizens Advice's second league table

With Christmas approaching many of us will be ordering online. But will our parcels arrive?

- Evri (formerly Hermes) comes last for a second year running, despite overall improvement, with 1.75 stars out of a possible 5.
- Yodel got the lowest rating score on any criteria, with just 1.70 for customer service
- Almost half (46%) of customers who had an issue with their last delivery faced further problems when resolving the issue with their given delivery firm.
- Royal Mail scores highest, knocking Amazon off the top spot and bettering its score from last year with 3 stars overall.
- None of the major companies reach a 4 or 5-star service overall.

Citizens Advice has revealed the scale of dodgy deliveries still blighting online shoppers, with its second annual parcel league table.

Four of the top five firms failed to secure even a 3-star overall rating, after being scored against criteria including customer service, parcel problems and accessibility needs (such as people needing longer to answer the door).

Citizens Advice found:

- No parcel companies hit 3 stars when it comes to meeting the needs of disabled customers and any other individuals who require adjustments for how they receive parcels. DPD scored highest with 2.4 stars, but across all delivery firms, people needing extra support with their delivery were more than twice as likely to face delivery problems, compared with those who did not (54% and 26% respectively).
- Yodel scores the lowest score on any criteria, scoring 1.70 for customer service. Close to half (43%) of Yodel customers polled by Citizens Advice reported a problem with their last delivery, compared to just over a quarter (28%) of Royal Mail customers.
- Almost half (46%) of customers who had an issue with their last delivery faced further problems when trying to find a resolution, such as not being able to find the right contact details or not receiving a response. Worst offenders were Yodel (52%), Evri and DPD (both 51%).
- Despite facing problems, customers still awarded the parcel companies improved trust scores compared to last year, with Amazon and Royal Mail achieving 4.33 stars. The charity says this could point to shoppers' generally low expectations of delivery firms.



Citizens Advice also revealed its online advice '[If something you ordered hasn't arrived](#)' has been viewed almost 211,000 times in the last 12 months, and was viewed 52,000 times in the three months leading up to Christmas 2021.



## Campaign News

Here are some of the projects that the Research and Campaigns team are working on.

**Universal Credit:** We are currently conducting a survey with our clients to find out their experiences of Universal Credit. We hope that the findings will inform Citizens Advice campaign to improve Universal Credit.

**Access to Justice:** Amelia is exploring ways to improve access for our clients to free legal advice. This is already making progress with an arrangement for referrals to a nearby Law Clinic and with local solicitors to provide free initial consultations. Further developments are under discussion.

**Cost of Living:** Sean has written to our local MPs about the need to enhance benefit payments in a time of high inflation. He has also had an article printed in the Spalding Guardian about this issue. Sean has addressed local groups about coping with the increased cost of energy.

**Social Media:** Our Social Media content is an increasingly popular method to engage with the public on matters of concern and raise awareness of scams (see below).

## Find us on Social Media.

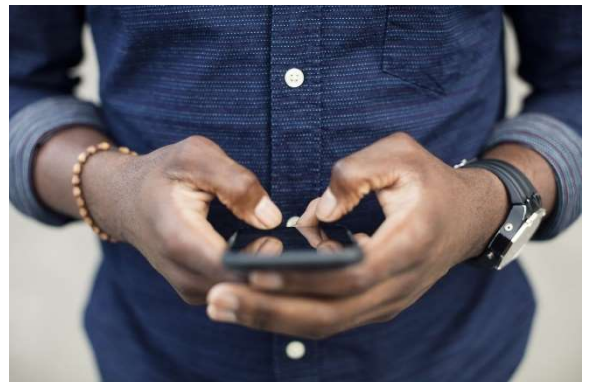
(Sean).

The recent months have once more seen our social media audience increase. Facebook is now liked/followed by 219 people. We reached 900 people. On Twitter, we are followed

by 742 people. We reached 3000 people. Our social media following engagement has increased but

it does look like we are returning to pre-covid levels of engagement.

In addition to this, our Facebook and Twitter are still important in sharing information about developing Research and Campaigns issues.



You do not need to have an account to see either our Twitter or Facebook pages. They can both be accessed at [www.citizensadviceSouthlincs.org.uk](http://www.citizensadviceSouthlincs.org.uk) by clicking on the speech bubbles in the 'connect with us' box on the website home page.

## Evidence forms September to November 2022.

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 during September, October, and November.

Type	Number
Housing	25
Benefits	15
Universal Credit	15
Consumer	12
Utilities	9
Employment	7
Charity & Food Banks	6
Debt	6
Health	6
Immigration	4
Travel	4
Finance	3
Relationships	2
Legal	2
Tax	1
Discrimination & Hate	1
Education	0
Other	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>

### 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, [impactofficer@citizensadviceSouthlincs.org.uk](mailto:impactofficer@citizensadviceSouthlincs.org.uk).