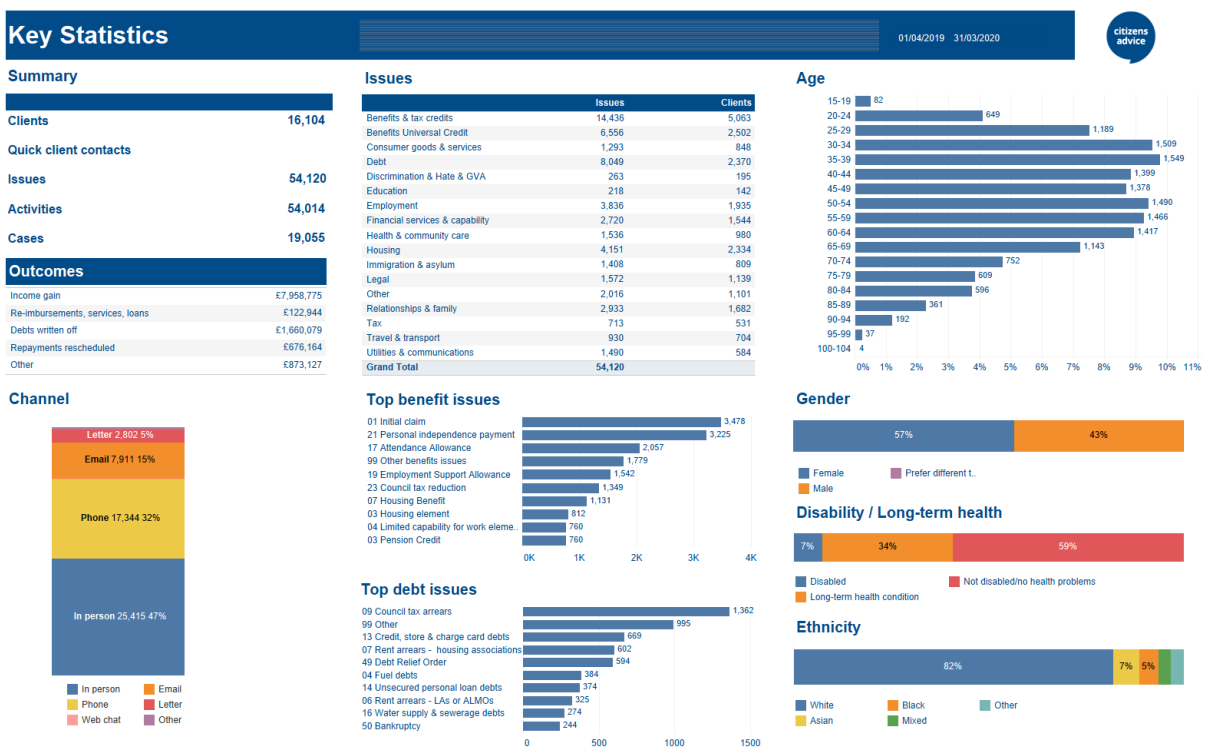


Citizens Advice - Addressing Health Issues and Inequalities in Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire benefits from 4 Citizens Advice charities working collaboratively to provide local residents with free, independent and impartial advice and information on a range of issues identified as social determinants of ill health. Whilst people can self-help with up to date information on the [Citizens Advice website](#), many need additional support to address social problems. This additional support is provided by local Citizens Advice – people can self-refer or be referred by other agencies.

Our specialist advisors provide a spectrum of interventions ranging from coaching a client to self-help, to providing intensive casework on behalf of a client to address social issues that often have great detriment to the client’s health and wellbeing. In particular debt, benefits, housing, family problems and employment issues.

Nearly half of the people we support are from areas of deprivation and have disabilities or chronic health conditions. The table below shows service provision in 2019/2020:



Between April 2019 and March 2020, 47% of all clients were supported in the face to face services by attending a drop in session in our venues with some requiring additional appointments. 32% chose to make contact by phone, 15% by email/webchat and 5% by letter. However, even when the initial contact was on the phone, by email/webchat or letter, the person would most likely attend a follow up face to face appointment or be offered a home visit, particularly when client paperwork needed to be reviewed by the advisor.

Whilst we have adapted the delivery of the advice services over the last number of years to give clients more choice with how to access the service, Covid resulted in a rapid and significant shift to support on the telephone, by email and using online meetings. We did however maintain a limited face to face provision where digital channels just would not suffice. We implemented Covid

precautions (limited numbers of people in the venue, use of face masks, ventilation and additional cleaning processes between client appointments).

Advice service provision has continued however uptake has changed both in the way people access the service, the client cohort and the issues presenting. We have found that client numbers have dropped but complexity of issues and the means to address them has increased.



3 of the 4 Citizens Advice were commissioned to distribute the government Hardship Funds and the Winter Support Funds which provide funds for the purchase of shopping, and support with the payment of utility bills for people who are severely financially impacted due to the pandemic.

Benefits in Place

3 of the 4 local Citizens Advice (Oxford, North Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire) have been in receipt of OCC Public Health grants to deliver the **Benefits In Practice** service providing specialist benefits advice in specific GP practices in their area. This service enabled the GPs in these practices to directly refer patients to a Benefits Advisor based in their practice for a session each week. This service has been of great value to the patients who have been referred however there have been two key delivery issues; access to space for the benefits advisor to deliver the session in the surgery, and inconsistency in referring patients which has resulted in the service often being under utilised in one area and over utilised in another.

Although each local Citizens Advice had an individual grant with OCC to deliver the service, we reported on the service outcomes collectively. We recognised that we were not getting the fullest benefit from the opportunity both for Oxfordshire GP surgeries, and for people needing benefits advice, particularly when lockdown impacted the service delivery.

OCC Public Health have now commissioned a pilot to adapt the existing provision from Benefits in Practice to Benefits in Place. This will widen the referral base to ensure fuller uptake as well as make the service countywide to include people in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, resulting in greater use of funding and parity of provision. It will also make accessing the service much easier for clients and referrers.

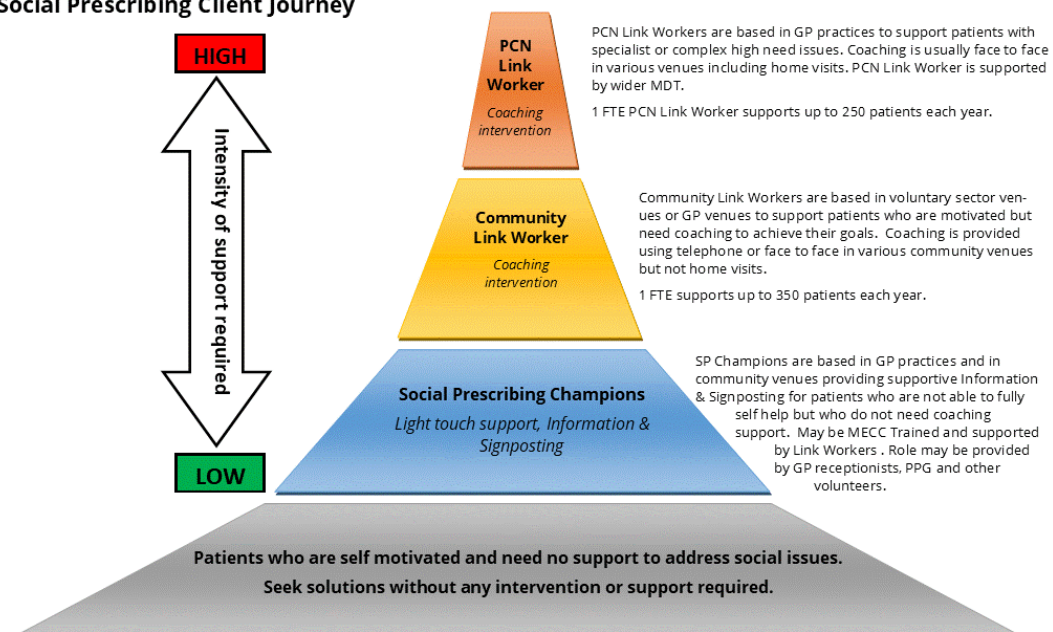
Benefits in Practice will have a county-wide digital referral system (telephone or online referral portal) connecting with GPs, food access services, social prescribers, pharmacies and supermarkets and other place based organisations so that advice can be accessed from wherever people are. To do this we are:

- Using our existing resources in a different way to create a virtual county team.
- Creating a single contact point for the county that health and other community partners can make referrals to, widening access to the service to all community health services, rather than the few GP surgeries that benefited from the historical Benefits in Practice provision.
- Exploring and piloting partnerships in different community settings to target those people that are in the most need.
- Targeting those areas with the highest need as indicated by the indices of multiple deprivation, but not excluding those isolated in rural Oxfordshire, whose deprivation and inequality issues are hidden by the relative affluence of the area.
- Learning what works best with a view to making longer term developments and changes to the service for the future
- We will provide a single quarterly county report with one client case study, and one case study demonstrating effective partnership working

Community Connect Social Prescribing

Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire partnered to bid for funding from NHS England, with match funding from the district councils and OCCG to deliver a social prescribing service addressing the issues of loneliness, social isolation and inactivity. This service started in April 2018 and has funding until March 2022 delivering the Community Link Worker and Social Prescribing Champions elements of the social prescribing service provision in Oxfordshire as described below:

Social Prescribing Client Journey

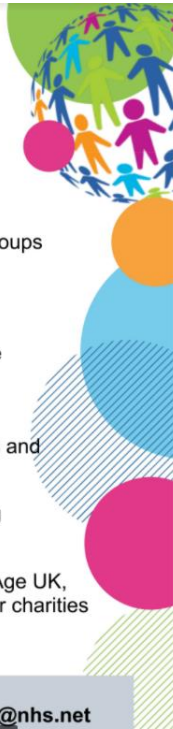


Community Connect

Social Prescribing Service
We can help with.....

- Social isolation and loneliness - befriending and finding social groups
- Lifestyle changes to help with depression and anxiety
- Benefits, debt and money advice
- Supporting carers
- Learning new skills, volunteering and looking for work
- Motivational support with making healthier choices eg. exercise
- Linking in with Citizens Advice, Age UK, Dementia Oxfordshire, and other charities that can support you

Tel : 0300 004 0401
Email : community.connect@nhs.net



The Community Connect service has also had to adapt due to lockdown. Initially the Community Link Workers provided wellbeing checks to patients and this has adapted to helping people make use of online and covid safe activities in their community as ways of achieving their social prescribing goals.

NOTE: Community Connect is only available for patients in **Cherwell and West Northamptonshire**.

Connect! A new partnership in Cherwell to bridge the digital divide



Citizens Advice NOSN has been working with Cherwell District Council, Age UK, RVS, Cornhill Companions, Dementia UK and the Banbury Mosque on the Age Friendly Banbury initiative. The purpose of this group is to make the town centre a place that is attractive and accommodating for older people. We were working on various themes – getting about, getting connected, feeling safe etc. These issues became even more important when lockdown occurred.

As 2020 progressed it became evident that access to online services over the internet were critical for many people who were self isolating or unable to get out but did not use online service either by choice or because they were not able to afford IT devices and

internet connections. However, the traditional approach to bringing people into in person training sessions was not possible.

From this Connect! was established. In Phase 1 we trained Digital Volunteers who can go to a client's homes to help them set up and use their digital devices. Phase 2 will involve accessing devices and/or internet connection for people who need them and support to set them up and use them.

This service is currently only available in Cherwell but can be scaled countywide.

Pat Coomber-Wood Chief Executive Officer Citizens Advice NOSN 14 Feb 2021 pat.coomber-wood@cano.org.uk