

A summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

Citizens Advice Information and Advice Service Survey 2022



Executive summary

Introduction

Survey purpose

The Information and Advice Service is delivered by Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East, and provides free information and advice to people around benefits, debt, housing and employment. The service is funded by Cheshire East Council.

The council conducted a survey about the service, to help decide how the service should be provided in future.

Survey methodology and response

The survey was conducted between during 2022, and was promoted [on the council's consultation webpages](#), as well as through [the council's Digital Influence Panel](#). In total 266 survey responses were received.

High levels of awareness of the service

A large proportion of respondents, 85%, had heard of the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East), with 74% aware the service provides financial information and advice.

A large majority of those that had heard of the service were “always aware of the service” (72% of respondents). “Word of mouth” (7%), “friend” (6%) and “family member” (6%) were the next most popular ways of being aware of the service.

13% of those that had heard of the service had contacted the service within the last year, with 41% having contacted it longer ago, and the reminder having never contacted the service.

Those that had contacted the service

Of those that had contacted the service, the most popular way of contacting it was “in person – attending an appointment” (37%) and “by phone” (34%), and the most popular reasons for contacting the service were “legal issues” (24%), “benefits advice” (20%) and “consumer issues” (17%).

Of those that had contacted the service, the most popular type of support they were given was “General advice, information or signposting” (52%).

Satisfaction with the service

Majorities of respondents agreed that:

- The service gave them the confidence to deal with their issue (72% agree, 11% disagree)
- The service helped them cope better (58% agree, 17% disagree)

Smaller proportions of respondents agreed that the service improved their financial situation (29% agree, 23% disagree).

Using the service in future

The main barriers in managing finances that respondents had faced were:

- Cost of living crisis (50% of respondents selected this)
- Knowing what benefits I'm entitled to (33%)
- Knowing where to go for help (32%)

Respondents felt they might need a wide range of advice in future, with them most likely needing advice around:

- Benefits (40% of respondents selected this)
- Health and community care (38%)
- Consumer issues (31%)
- Utilities (gas, electricity, water) (30%)
- Transport (blue badge, bus passes etc) (28%)
- Financial issues (27%)
- Legal issues (25%)

When respondents need information and advice about money worries in the future they would be most likely to go to Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East (54% of respondents selected this) or search online for self-help advice (41%).

48% of respondents would prefer to get help in future in person at an appointment.

Positive feedback on the service (87 comments total)

Respondents described the Citizens Advice Bureau as being “very important”, “valuable”, “amazing”, “brilliant”, “fundamental”, and “good value for money”. They felt the service is a great asset to the local community, and that it will be even more important during difficult financial times when the disadvantaged will be even more adversely affected.

Others praised the service further describing the CAB advisors as “courteous”, “professional”, “helpful”, “polite”, “empathetic”, “non-judgemental”, “unbiased”, “supportive”, “kind mannered”, “informed”, “listeners”.

A number of professionals lauded the service, describing it as an excellent service to refer patients to – this included professionals such as GPs, Social Workers, Baptist Ministers and Foster Carers.

Negative feedback on the service (40 comments total)

Some said they were not aware of the service, and that advertising of it needs improvement – they did not know where it is located, or what the phone number is.

Other stressed that face to face meetings for CAB are important felt they are needed in areas where they are currently not provided, such as in Crewe and Bollington. Others felt the CAB library drop-in sessions that used to be held had been useful, and wondered if these would recommence post pandemic.

Some felt contact by phone with the service was difficult.

Finally, some felt confused over the funding for CAB, as they pointed out their local Town or Parish Council also provide funding for the service as well as Cheshire East Council.

Conclusions

Awareness of the service

It is positive that such a large proportion of respondents – 85% – had heard of the service before taking the survey. This and the fact a high proportion of respondents reported they were “always aware of the service” suggests the service is well known and therefore well promoted.

However, it should be noted that some respondents commented they were not aware of the name change of the service (to the “Information and Advice Service”) – this may be confusing to some when used instead of the traditional “Citizens Advice Service” which seems very well known.

Use of the service

Respondents seemed to indicate that they take a wide range of advice from the service, and would want to continue to do so in future. The cost of living crisis certainly seems to be a high concern for respondents at the moment, and advice around that and applying for benefits and advice on utilities may become more prevalent in the immediate future.

Satisfaction with the service

Levels of satisfaction with some aspects of the service are very high, with 72% of respondents agreeing the service gave them confidence to deal with issues, and 58% agreeing the service helped them cope better.

Within written comments in the survey there was much praise for the service, which is unusual for written feedback as that usually tends to be more negative. But it is clear that Citizens Advice is an invaluable and vital service for those facing adversity, and for health professionals who refer people to the service.

Areas for improvement

If there are any areas for improvement within the service it may be around:

- Providing more practical help as well as advice
- Improving advertising of the service even further
- Ensuring face to face meetings are available in all towns in Cheshire East, perhaps by reinstating library drop-in sessions where practicable

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Report produced 30 September 2022 by the Research and Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council. Email RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk for further information.

Introduction

Survey purpose

The Information and Advice Service is delivered by Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East, and is a partnership of Citizens Advice Cheshire East and Citizens Advice Cheshire North.

They provide free, confidential and independent information and advice to local people, including help with benefits, debt, housing and employment. The service is funded by Cheshire East Council to help people manage their own income and finances.

The council conducted a survey about the service, to help the council decide how the service should be provided in future.

Survey methodology

The survey was conducted between 18 July and 23 September 2022.

The survey was widely promoted in the following ways:

- [On the council's consultation webpages](#)
- [Through the council's Digital Influence Panel](#)

Survey response

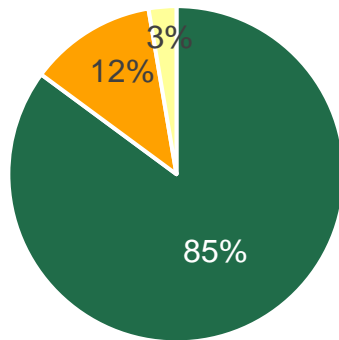
In total 266 survey responses were received, including:

- 207 responses from the Digital Influence Panel
- 59 responses from all other sources

Awareness of the Information and Advice Service

Before taking the survey, 85% of respondents had heard of the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East).

Before taking this survey, had you ever heard of the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East)?

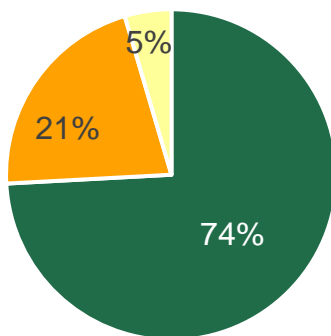


- Yes I had heard of the Information and Advice Service before
- No I had not heard of the Information and Advice Service before
- Not sure / Don't know

Number of responses = 262

Before taking this survey, 74% of respondents were aware the Information and Advice Service provides financial information and advice.

Before taking this survey, were you aware the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East) provides financial information and advice?



- Yes I was aware the Information and Advice Service provides financial information and advice
- No I was not aware the Information and Advice Service provides financial information and advice
- Not sure / Don't know

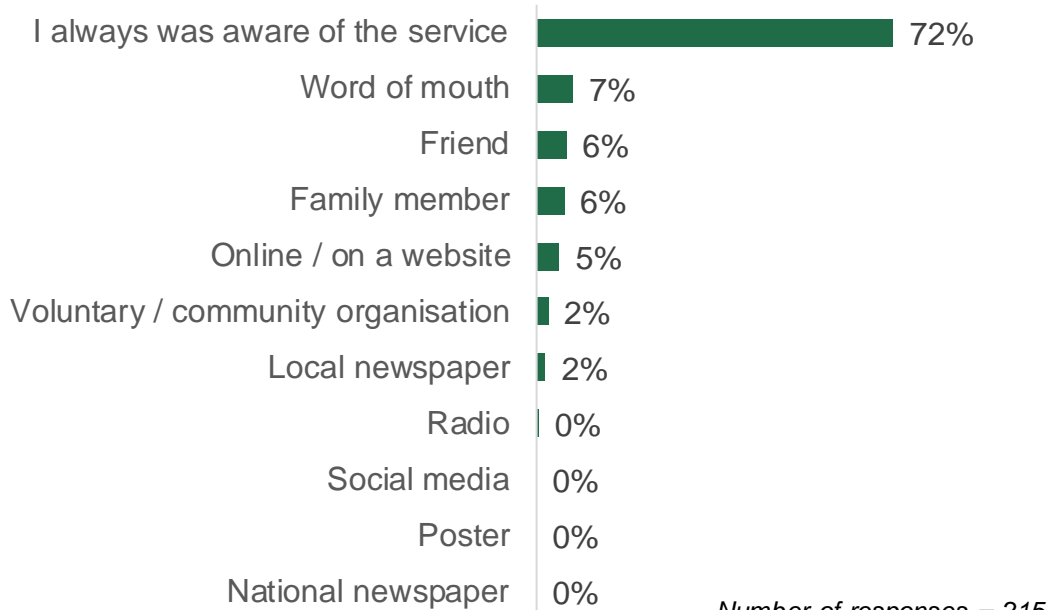
Number of responses = 263

Those that had heard of the service

When asked where they first heard about the Information and Advice Service, a large proportion of those that had heard of the service, 72%, said they were “always aware of the service”.

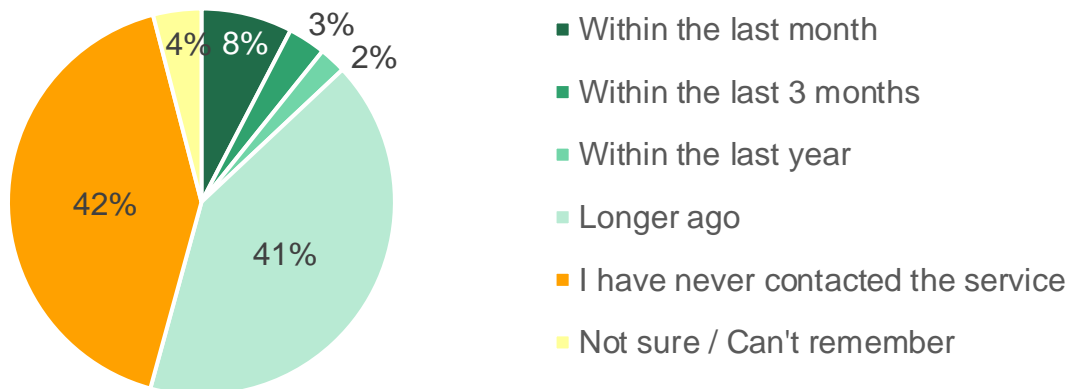
“Word of mouth” (7%), “friend” (6%) and “family member” (6%) were the next most popular answers.

Where did you first hear about the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East)?



13% of those that had heard of the service had contacted the service within the last year, with 41% having contacted it longer ago. 42% were sure they had never contacted the service.

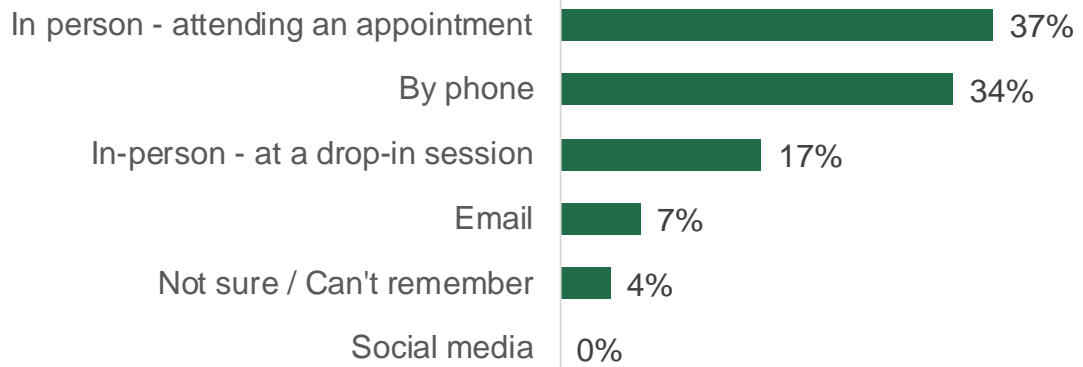
When was the last time you contacted the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East)?



Those that had contacted the service

Of those that had contacted the service, the most popular way of contacting it was “in person – attending an appointment” (37%) and “by phone” (34%).

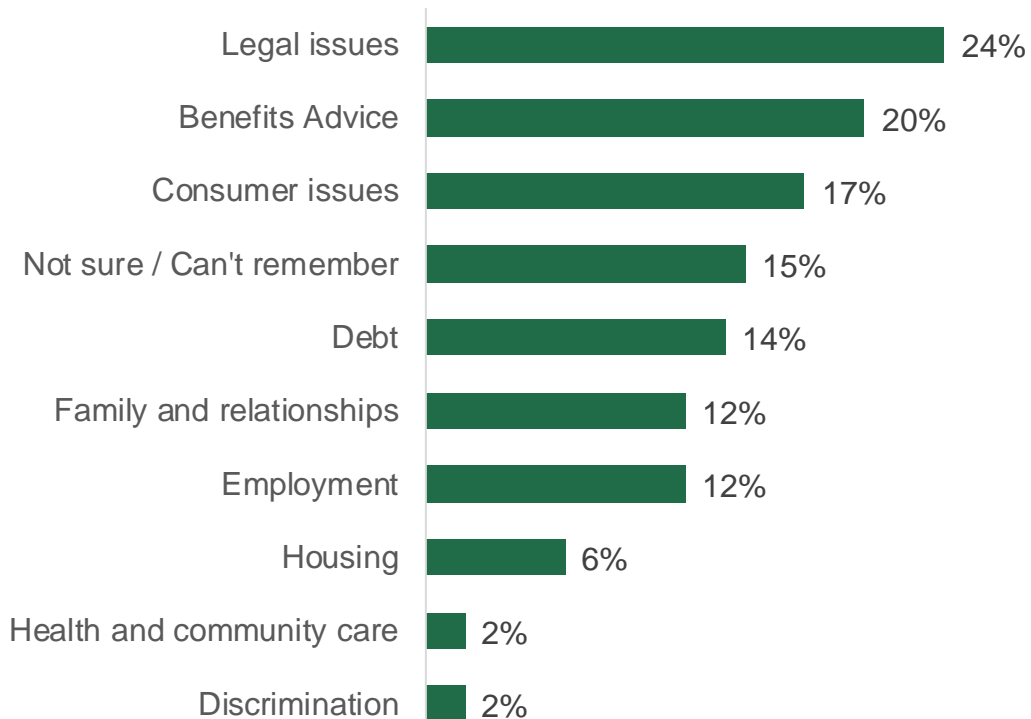
Thinking about your most recent contact with Information and Advice Service, how did you contact it?



Number of responses = 115

Of those that had contacted the service, the most popular reasons for doing so were “legal issues” (24%), “benefits advice” (20%) and “consumer issues” (17%).

Thinking about your most recent contact with the Information and Advice Service, what were the main reasons for contacting it? *Percentages may not add to 100% as respondents could select as many options as they wished*



Number of responses = 110

Of those that had contacted the service, the most popular type of support they were given was “General advice, information or signposting” (52%).

Thinking about your most recent contact with the Information and Advice Service, what type of support were you given? Percentages may not add to 100% as respondents could select as many options as they wished



Number of responses = 105

Satisfaction with the service

Majorities of respondents agreed that:

- The service gave them the confidence to deal with their issue (72% agree, 11% disagree)
- The service helped them find a solution (65% agree, 16% disagree)
- The service helped them cope better (58% agree, 17% disagree)

Smaller proportions of respondents agreed that:

- The service improved their mental health and wellbeing (39% agree, 23% disagree)
- The service improved their financial situation (29% agree, 23% disagree)

How strongly do you agree or disagree that...



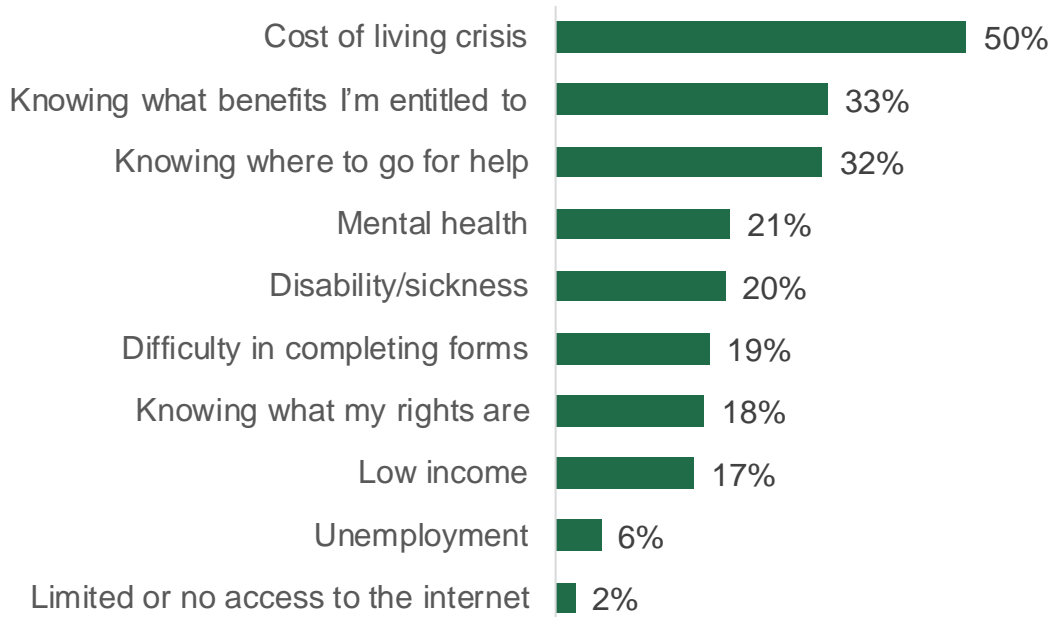
Number of responses between 118 and 119

Using the service in future

The main barriers in managing finances that respondents had faced were:

- Cost of living crisis (50% of respondents selected this)
- Knowing what benefits I'm entitled to (33%)
- Knowing where to go for help (32%)

What barriers, if any, have you faced in managing your own income and finances?
Percentages may not add to 100% as respondents could select as many options as they wished

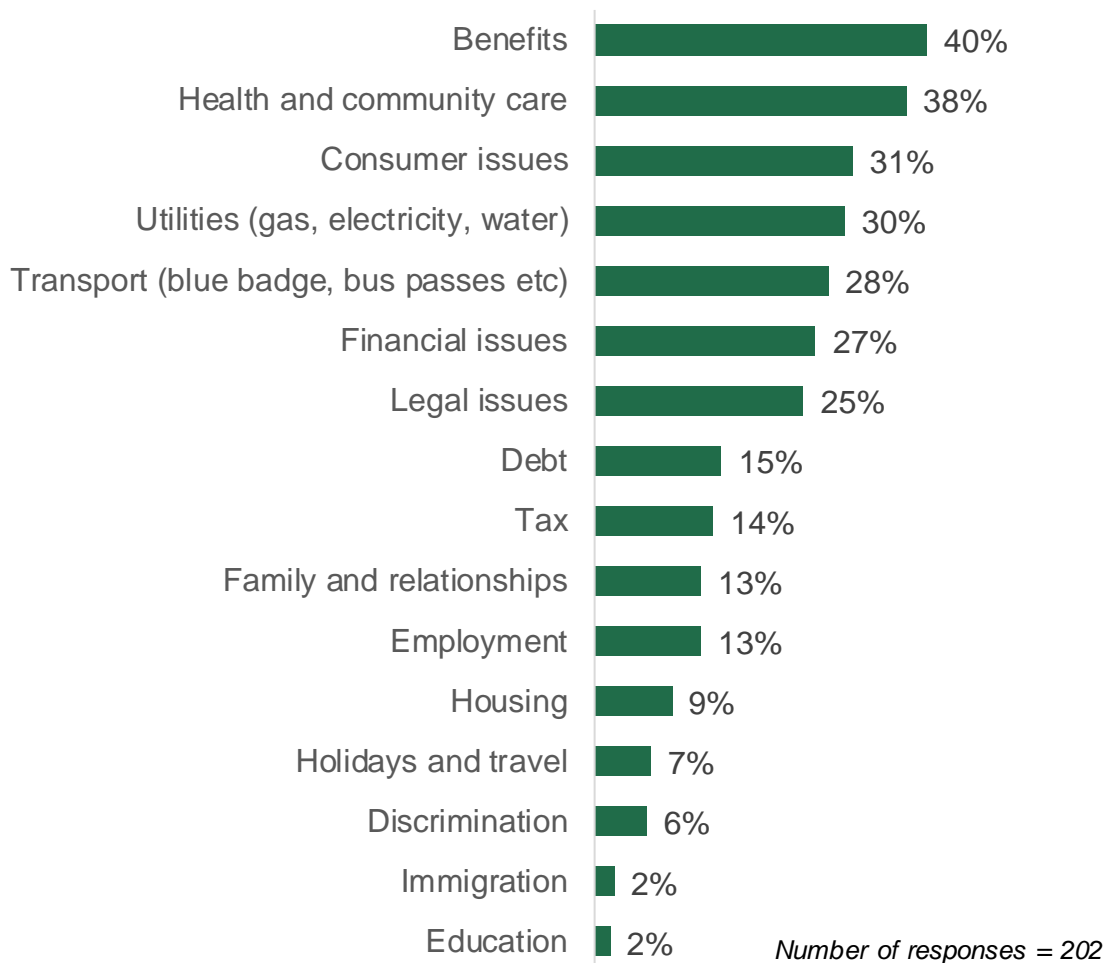


Number of responses = 161

Respondents felt they might need a wide range of advice in future, with them most likely needing advice around:

- Benefits (40% of respondents selected this)
- Health and community care (38%)
- Consumer issues (31%)
- Utilities (gas, electricity, water) (30%)
- Transport (blue badge, bus passes etc) (28%)
- Financial issues (27%)
- Legal issues (25%)

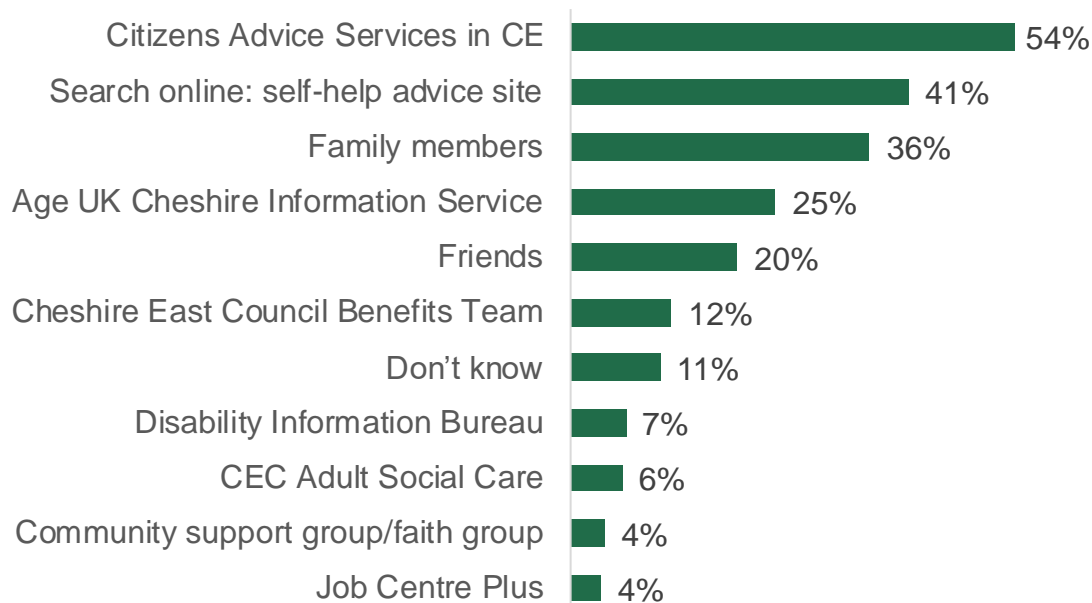
What type of advice, if any, do you feel you might need in future? *Percentages may not add to 100% as respondents could select as many options as they wished*



When respondents need information and advice about money worries in the future they would be most likely to go to:

- Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East (54% of respondents selected this)
- Search online for self-help advice (41%)
- Family members (36%)

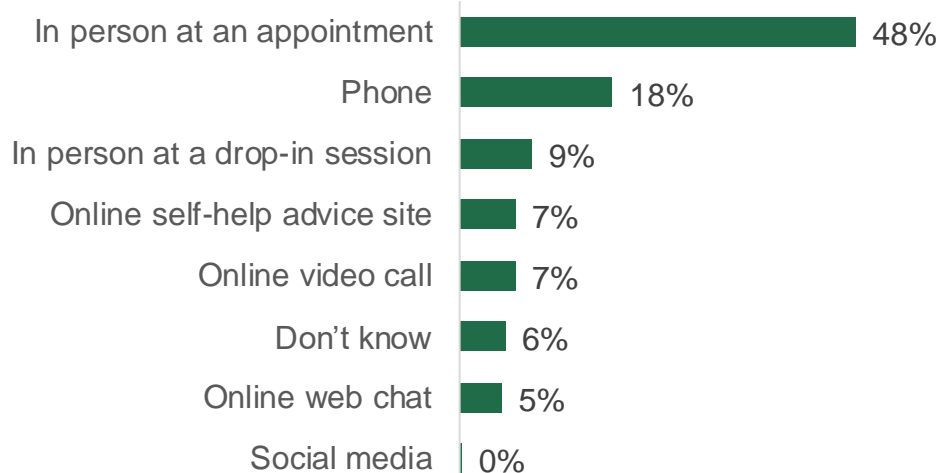
If you needed information and advice about money worries in the future, where would you go for help? Percentages may not add to 100% as respondents could select as many options as they wished



Number of responses = 238

48% of respondents would prefer to get help in future in person at an appointment.

Which would be your preferred way of getting this help (if no new Covid-19 restrictions were in place)?



Number of responses = 249

Comments about the service

Within the survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the Citizens Advice Service.

In total, 67 respondents made a comment, making a total of 134 separate comments between them.

These comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Positive feedback on the service (87 comments)

Respondents described the Citizens Advice Bureau as being “very important”, “valuable”, “amazing”, “brilliant”, “fundamental”, and “good value for money”. They felt the service is a great asset to the local community, and that it will be even more important during difficult financial times when the disadvantaged will be even more adversely affected. They felt demand for the service is likely to increase in the near future with the impact of the cost of living crisis, and that provision should mirror this expected increased demand (45 comments).

Others praised the service further describing the CAB advisors as “courteous”, “professional”, “helpful”, “polite”, “empathetic”, “non-judgemental”, “unbiased”, “supportive”, “kind mannered”, “informed”, “listeners” (21 comments).

A number of professionals lauded the service, describing it as an excellent service to refer patients to, and a service they referred people to a lot. This included GPs, Social Workers, Baptist Ministers and Foster Carers (8 comments).

Others felt the service must be retained, is underfunded, needs as much support as possible, and that it would be false economy to look at cost savings for preventative the services (13 comments).

Negative feedback on the service (40 Comments)

Some said they were not aware of the service, and that advertising of it needs improvement – they did not know where it is located, or what the phone number is. They felt it could be advertised it in the council newsletter, that it could be clearly sign posted from various points in town, or that the council could work with Faith and Voluntary organisations as well as educational establishments to help promote it. Some were not aware the service had changed its name. (12 comments).

Other stressed that face to face meetings for CAB are important. They stated they find it difficult to use the phone and would find it hard to communicate that way, and that face-to-face meetings are important for those who struggle with literacy. Some have been reluctant to contact the service due to there being no face-to-face services in

their local area (Crewe & Bollington). Others felt the CAB Library drop-in sessions that used to be held had been useful, for example the one held at Alsager Library before the pandemic. The CA Service at Alsager Library on Tuesday mornings pre-Covid were much appreciated by Alsager residents. Respondents asked when these would recommence (10 comments).

A handful of respondents reported having had bad experiences with the service (4 comments).

Some felt contact by phone with the service was difficult, and that they never use the service because whenever they had tried it was too difficult to get in touch with anyone, or to find the right advisor (3 comments).

Other comments included:

- It would be better if CAB could actually get involved with practical help as opposed to just signposting (3 comments)
- An online meeting option as well as face to face would be beneficial (2 comments)
- Some did not want to contact CAB because they knew people who volunteered, and didn't want that person acting as an advisor (2 comments)
- The public are deliberately kept in the dark about their benefit rights (1 comment)

Finally, some felt that there was confusion over funding for CAB – Some stated that their local Town or Parish Council, including Knutsford Town Council, Wilmslow Town Council and High Legh Parish Council pay annually to support CAB, and that in some cases this was the largest piece of our expenditure for the local councils. They were unaware of local councils were funding CAB as well as Cheshire East Council and felt this was confusing (3 comments).

Conclusions

Awareness of the service

It is positive that such a large proportion of respondents – 85% – had heard of the service before taking the survey. This and the fact respondents reported they were “always aware of the service” suggests the service is well known and therefore promoted.

However, it should be noted that some respondents commented they were not aware of the name change of the service (to the “Information and Advice Service”) – this may be confusing to some when used instead of the traditional “Citizens Advice Service” which seems very well known.

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Areas for improvement

If there are any areas for improvement within the service it may be around:

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