



From the CEO

Quarter 4 of 2022-'23 continued a trend of increased hardship for many with Citizens Advice nationally dealing with the highest ever number of people with crisis support who had energy debts. In Lewisham the same period saw the highest ever referral to our debt advice and to charitable support for food, clothing and energy support. Nationally, the number of people seeking crisis support has tripled since 2019.



In Lewisham demand for advice continues to exceed our capacity but we have increased our clients numbers overall by 10% by pushing our resources to their maximum. We are now helping over 2000 clients per month where last year it was 1800. Most clients have benefit concerns, many have debts and significant housing issues including risk of homelessness but most have energy debt and rent arrears. With the end of the reduction to the energy cap clients face much higher bills, and anticipated reductions will take months to impact. Ofgem data shows that over 4 million UK residents are in energy debt. We are exploring all funding opportunities to try to increase our capacity to expand help to more of those in need.

Foodbank referrals continue to increase with an overall increase of 80% in 2022-'23. The rising cost of many staples increasing by 150% means that all households are feeling the impact but for many of our clients it is impossible to manage these costs within their income. The number of clients with a negative budget, where they cannot cover their essential outgoings, has risen by 50% amongst debt clients nationally. This means that each month their debt rises with no prospect of addressing it in the medium term.

Homelessness has increased by 59% in Lewisham and rent arrears have been a dominant issue for clients for 2 years. At CAL we are lucky to have a trainee housing paralegal funded through Trust for London. Clients also benefit from our partnership with Lewisham and Southwark Law Centre where clients can be referred for full legal support and advocacy. But with open market rents increasing and over 4000 people in temporary accommodation in Lewisham we are looking to expand this service with additional housing expertise. We have also expanded our outreach services to Goldsmiths Community Centre, Deptford, Downham and are hoping our recent partnership funding application will enable us to work through our Advice Partner, Community Advice Work in New Cross. We know this helps the most vulnerable clients to access our help more readily.

Our team continue to go above and beyond, dealing with clients who are often suffering from many physical and practical issues. Almost 60% of our clients have either a long term or permanent disability. Many have mental health issues and require a great deal of support to navigate complex benefit and debt management processes. Our advisers not only develop exceptional advice knowledge but also people skills that enable them to help clients move forward in the most difficult of circumstances. The team have worked tirelessly in the face of their own struggles with the cost of living crisis and we are working to leverage pay increases where we can within very tight budgets. Building in flexibility and a 4 day week trial have improved our team spirit and substantially reduced our turnover.

In closing I would like to thank our key funders who enable us to continue to serve Lewisham residents. Lewisham Council, the GLA, Debt Free Advice, DWP's Help to Claim, Trust for London, Phoenix and L&Q housing associations whose funding enables us to deliver help and support to over 20,000 clients a year with the help of our Advice Lewisham partners. Partners include Community Advice Works, Age UK Lewisham & Southwark, Action For Refugees In Lewisham, Lewisham Refugee & Migrant Network, Lewisham Multi Lingual Advice Service and Lewisham Law Centre.

Fiona Derbyshire, CEO Citizens Advice Lewisham/ Chair Advice Lewisham Partnership



SAVE THE DATE

Citizens Advice Lewisham cordially invites you to our upcoming **Cost Of Living Forum**: an all day event focusing on the impact of the Cost Of Living crisis to Lewisham residents. The Forum will take place at **Council Chambers, Civic Suite**, Catford Rd, SE6 9SE on **Thursday, 13 July 2023** from 10am to 4pm.

You can RSVP by completing this short [online form](#).

The full agenda will be circulated in the first week of July.

We hope to have the opportunity to welcome you to our Forum. Please do not hesitate to contact us at: communications@citizensadvicelewisham.org.uk with any questions.

Advice First Aid (AFA) training session

In spring 2023, Citizens Advice Lewisham delivered its first two [Advice First Aid](#) training sessions for community support and faith organisations. We are grateful to all our wonderful attendees and newly qualified Advice First Aiders for their enthusiastic participation and we are delighted to announce a new session coming up on 24th and 25th of July 2023.

You can register for the upcoming Advice First Aid session online by completing this [form](#).



Right: some of our brilliant new Advice First Aiders

J O I N U S

We are currently seeking a Trustee with experience of Human Resources (HR) and employment law to join our charity board at a time of rapid change. S/he will contribute to the board as a general Trustee plus offer specific HR expertise.

For more information about the role and how to apply, please visit our website:

Become a Trustee

Deadline: 23 June 2023



**WE'RE TAKING ON
10K FOR JUSTICE**

AT THE



PLEASE SPONSOR OUR TEAM!

This June, a team of CAL staff members and volunteers will participate in the London Legal Walk 10k to improve Lewisham residents' access to justice.

Please support their efforts and, if you can, sponsor us through our [fundraising](https://londonlegalsupporttrust.enthuse.com/pf/citizens-advice-lewisham-2023) page:

<https://londonlegalsupporttrust.enthuse.com/pf/citizens-advice-lewisham-2023>

**citizens
advice**

Lewisham

