



# Our Impact in 2020/21

Citizens Advice Scotland Annual Report

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August 2021



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# Introduction

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Scotland's Citizens Advice Network empowers people in every corner of Scotland through our local bureaux and national services by providing free, confidential, and independent advice. We use people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help, and we change lives for the better.

At the heart of the network there are 59 individual Citizens Advice Bureaux organisations across Scotland, all operating as independent charities in their own right and generally focusing on providing support directly to clients. Each of these organisations is a member of Citizens Advice Scotland.

As the national component of the network, Citizens Advice Scotland provides training and information to bureau teams, as well as a rigorous quality assurance and monitoring programme, ensuring that the same high quality of advice is available across Scotland. We work to secure national programmes and projects that provide support to individuals on specific issues (in Scotland and across Great Britain), delivered through bureaux wherever possible and directly where that is most appropriate. We also carry out research, policy work and campaigning on key issues - based on a statistical analysis of the advice sought by clients from across the network.

2020/21 was a year like no other as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions needed to halt the spread of the virus. This posed an extraordinary set of challenges to the network – our advice and advocacy work would never have been more needed, but restrictions on face to face advice and the fast moving nature of policy development would make it harder to deliver. As this report shows, the network didn't miss a beat, and stepped up to this once in a lifetime challenge.



# Our vision and purpose

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The Scottish Citizens Advice network has a footprint in every local community in Scotland and by linking this local offering with our national expertise in advice provision, which includes consumer and energy issues, we can ensure that people can access advice where and how they want, regardless of where they live in Scotland.

Our work is two-fold; advice and advocacy. We hold the largest data set on societal issues outside the public sector and because we are wholly independent from government, we can use our insight, evidence and influence to provide a genuine voice for people.

Our advocacy work spans working with governments, regulators and business at a UK and Scottish level on improving areas of particular detriment, undertaking research and delivering awareness and education campaigns.

We combine high quality research, first hand consumer case studies from across the Citizens Advice Scotland network and industry monitoring to identify and analyse existing and potential consumer issues. This work allows us to then engage with decision makers in government, companies and regulators and achieve changes that will benefit consumers in Scotland. This virtuous circle of advice and advocacy delivers results for communities across Scotland. We believe that every citizen in Scotland should have access to free, impartial and confidential advice that helps them make informed decisions, whenever they need it and however they choose to access it.



Our network  
has a footprint  
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# Strategic framework

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We aim to build a fairer society by enhancing and adding value for the Citizens Advice network, which provides free access to quality information and advice for all, and by influencing for positive change.

In 2017-18 we created a strategic framework following an extensive programme of consultation and discussion.

This framework is comprised of four strategic focus areas:

## 1. Funding and income

Appropriate funding and income is critical to the Citizens Advice network and we have a key role to play in securing it.

## 2. Enabling service delivery

High quality advice and information should be available for all who need it – and to make that a reality we must work together effectively across the network.

## 3. Building brand.

The brand of Citizens Advice Scotland is a valuable asset. We believe it should be protected and that by building it we can provide greater support to the network and to citizens.

## 4. Advocacy and influence.

Citizens Advice Scotland acts as a voice for the network in Scotland, influencing decision makers in the interests of the network as a whole and of citizens.

In 2021/22 CAS has begun the process of refreshing our strategy.



# The once in a lifetime challenge of Covid-19

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On 23 March 2020, the United Kingdom went into lockdown to slow the spread of the Covid- 19 virus. The orders to stay at home meant Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) would have to transition to remote working quickly to get people the help they needed.

As millions of people found themselves unable to work and facing financial insecurity as a result of the pandemic, policymakers had to make fast decisions to ensure people had support.

The network's achievements over the year that followed are broken down among our strategic focus areas.

## Building brand

- > CAS saw huge growth of our online advice content over the course of the pandemic, with 2.5 million unique users of our Advice for Scotland website.
- > We partnered with the Scottish Government for four separate marketing campaigns during key points of the pandemic to ensure people had access to our advice online, from CABs and through Scotland's Citizens Advice Helpline. The campaigns covered print, television, digital and radio.
- > We launched [www.MoneyMap.scot](http://www.MoneyMap.scot) which rounded up online options for people to boost their incomes and cut their cost of living. Since its launch in November it has attracted over 100,000 visitors.
- > Our campaigns programme for 2020/21 was co-designed with the network, to reflect the challenges of campaigning during social distancing and the issues CABs wanted us to reach people on. As a result we campaigned on issues such as redundancy rights, the launch of our money map and Big Energy Saving Month.
- > Our weekly column in the Herald newspaper ran for the full year and still does. Covering a broad range of issues from across the impact and advice services directorates, we retained a weekly national media presence on a breadth of issues very few other organisations in Scotland would be capable of.
- > We agreed a strategic partnership with Young Scot, which will help us reach more young people with our advice and open up opportunities for more young people to volunteer with the network.
- > The Scottish Parliament debated the work of the Citizens Advice network during the pandemic, with MSPs from across the chamber praising the work of CABs. During the Scottish Parliament elections we produced a video featuring the leaders of Scotland's 5 main political parties praising the work of CAB staff and volunteers.
- > We undertook a programme of capacity building for CABs to improve their skills when it comes to campaigning work, with sessions on media, digital and design.

# The once in a lifetime challenge of Covid-19

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## Advocacy and influence

During the pandemic we started the publication of regular data reports based on the demand for advice that CABs and our public advice site were seeing, and distributed them to key stakeholders like ministers, parliamentarians and civil servants. These changes in advice patterns and growth in demand for certain areas informed decision making by government and industry on key policy areas.

- > We developed and published a manifesto ahead of the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, urging the next Scottish Parliament to focus on the immediate risk people will face financially during the economic aftermath of the pandemic. Key asks were adopted in party manifestos, such as doubling the Scottish Child Payment and more investment in green infrastructure.
- > CAS helped those struggling financially from the economic effects of coronavirus by securing legislative change to increase the time to seek debt advice, removal of fees for bankruptcies and increasing debt thresholds, extending and making permanent debtor friendly measures in Coronavirus legislation.
- > We influenced the Scottish Renewal Advisory Board to include our proposal for a person-centred approach for helping people experiencing money and debt problems as one of its key recommendations in its report to Scottish Government.
- > CAS joined the Connecting Scotland Advisory Board and will be able to influence the future roll out of the programme. The homepage for those receiving devices via Connecting Scotland now contains links to the CAS public advice site and Bureau finder page as well as links to further information such as the Money Map tool. The Scottish Government has extended this programme, a key ask from CAS.
- > CAS secured protections for small charities in Scotland, working in partnership with telecommunications regulator Ofcom as part of the UK's implementation of the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC). Originally Ofcom proposed extra protections would only apply to not for profit customers with less than 10 staff (including volunteers). CAS successfully argued it would be detrimental to charities in Scotland if volunteer numbers were included. Ofcom agreed with our reasoning and decided not to proceed with this proposal. This ensures that many third sector organisations in Scotland including Citizens Advice Bureau are able to benefit from these new customer protection measures.
- > Our work on the devolution of social security has led to legislative change which will result in a more positive experience for disabled people.
- > Our unique insight in housing issues has secured the extension and expansion of protections for renters.
- > We successfully advocated for temporary positive changes to Universal Credit, such as the £20 per week uplift, to continue for a longer period of time in the Spring of 2021.
- > CAS research evidence and advocacy work on behalf of low income households has supported a decision by the Scottish Government to increase the Water Charges Reduction Scheme from 25% to 30% during 2021-27. This will provide greater financial support to households that need it most.
- > The Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 24 February and included measures CAS lobbied for, including better consumer protections and community engagement measures.

# Funding and income

We recognise that appropriate funding and income is critical to the success and impact of the whole Citizens Advice network in Scotland, and that we have a key role to play in securing it. Over the year the following projects have been delivered and introduced.

<b>Scottish Citizens Advice network</b>	<b>20/21 £'m</b>	<b>19/20 £'m</b>
Advice services to citizens including:	16.0	13.8
Armed Services Advice Project	0.6	0.7
Covid Support	2.3	0.0
EU Settlement Scheme	0.7	1.1
Energy Best Deal	0.7	0.6
Gambling Support Service	0.2	0.0
Money Talk Team (formerly Financial Health Check)	1.4	1.7
PASS	0.8	0.8
Pensionwise	1.8	1.7
Universal Credit	4.1	4.0
Welfare Reform	1.5	1.4
Other	1.9	1.8
Advocacy services on behalf of citizens	3.7	3.5
Support to our local bureaux	3.1	2.9
<b>Total investment in services to Scottish citizens</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>20.2</b>

- > We rolled out a new Gambling Support Service to raise awareness of gambling harms and deliver training to frontline workers to help recognise those at risk of gambling harms.
- > We continued to deliver the Help to Claim service, supporting clients applying for Universal Credit. The Service was further supported by radio advertising delivered by the DWP.
- > The network also secured a further year of funding to deliver the Money Talk Team and Welfare Reform projects.
- > New funding for a debt advice service was brought into the network following a donation from JP Morgan Chase Foundation.



# Enabling service delivery

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CAS works to support every bureaux to deliver the confidential, impartial and expert advice that people across the country have come to expect and over the past year this has required new approaches and investment in technology infrastructure in order to maintain these services.

- > Our Extra Help Unit based in Glasgow continued to support vulnerable consumers and unlocked £2M in financial redress for consumers.
- > The network introduced Scotland's Citizens Advice Helpline in direct response to the pandemic. This allowed advisers to continue to meet the advice needs of clients across the country by telephone throughout lockdown.
- > CAS secured a £1.5M grant from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to support our COVID response. Of this grant, CAS allocated £800k of emergency grant funding to bureaux to future proof the network, support local delivery and enhance and support digital advice. The further £700,000 was invested in network wide infrastructure improvements, for example we doubled the bandwidth of the shared services platform ensuring improved network speed and stability to further support remote working. The funding also allowed us to invest in our digital advice resources to allow timely and continuous updating of information and we provide licences to vital digital resources for advisers.
- > Supported by funding from a variety of sources, including Scottish Government, we ensured the network could procure PPE from approved sources and assisted in the process and we provided advice and guidance to the network as the pandemic progressed and developed training to support the return to work post pandemic.
- > We undertook research with focus groups and created a toolkit to support recruitment and therefore volunteer capacity for CABs to use when they are able to take on more volunteers. New materials were developed to deliver online training and to support tutors.
- > In terms of technology investments, we rolled out improvements to 10to8, an appointment booking system to facilitate better appointment management and allow for appropriate distancing and safety. And we migrated bureaux to the Avaya telephony system for local calls and for seamless use for national projects allowing increased flexibility of resources.
- > We transferred CASTLE to a cloud-based system and introduced authentication protocols which meant the system can be accessed from any location resulting in increased flexibility of workplace and we invested in the creation of a hybrid office/remote capability (VPN) and rolled it out to users across the network ensuring safe and secure home working was possible for the longer term.
- > We invested in a new IT service desk tool allowing better management and prioritisation of helpdesk requests and an improved service offering.
- > We rolled out Office 365 to all shared services bureaux and CAS staff and we invested in upgraded hardware to allow staff and volunteers to work from home successfully.
- > We undertook consumer research and updated our advice as the UK left the EU.



[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)



@CitAdviceScot



CitizensAdviceScotland

The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity and is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association which set out the objects and powers of the charitable company. In the event of the company being wound up the liability of the members is limited to £1.

The Association is also known as Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS).



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