



Impact of COVID-19 on the advice sought from the Scottish Citizens Advice network – January 2021

Introduction

This is the tenth monthly summary of data from the Citizens Advice network in Scotland since the COVID-19 outbreak and covers January 2021. It shows data from the 59 Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland and our online advice site. This edition covers the top advice topics for January.

Key points

- > In January Citizens Advice Bureaux issued **82,835** pieces of advice.
- > In January pages on the website were viewed a total of **361,353** times, which is **31%** higher than in the same month last year.
- > There were **241,918** website users in January 2021, which is **35%** more than the same month last year (179,581)

*Note the term 'pieces of advice' is used throughout this report. An individual person seeking help from their Citizens Advice Bureau may be given several pieces of advice on one or more topics.

January 2021 - impact of COVID-19

Total pieces of advice provided in January:

82,835



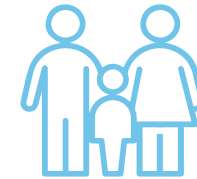
Number of contacts in January:

40,470



Number of clients in January:

22,139



Number of unique page views in January:

361,353



31% more than the same month last year.

Number of website users in January:

241,918



35% more than the same month last year.

61%

increase in views of **Covid Benefits Checker** page compared with November



72%

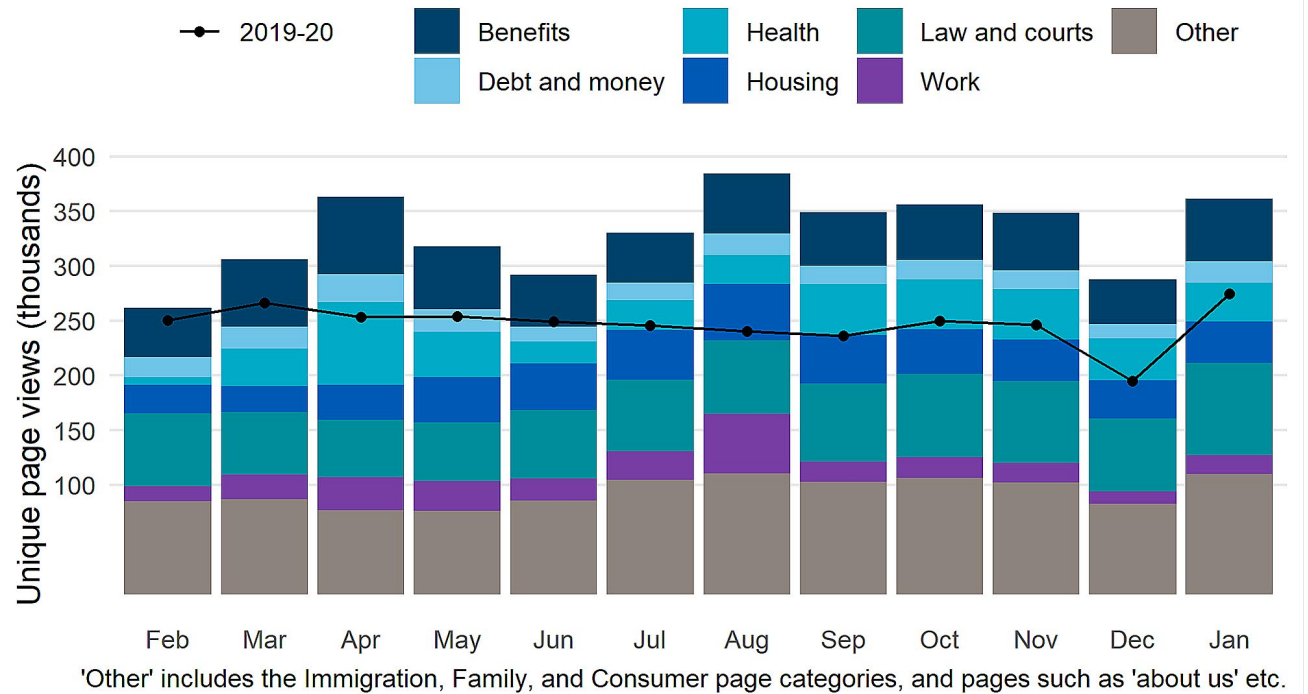
increase in views of webpage **About Being Furloughed** compared to November



Public advice website

Use of the Advice for Scotland website increased between December 2020 and January 2021 as expected. As a result, January 2021 was the third most active of the previous 12 months based on page views and user numbers. Moreover, the website is used around a third more than it was a year ago.

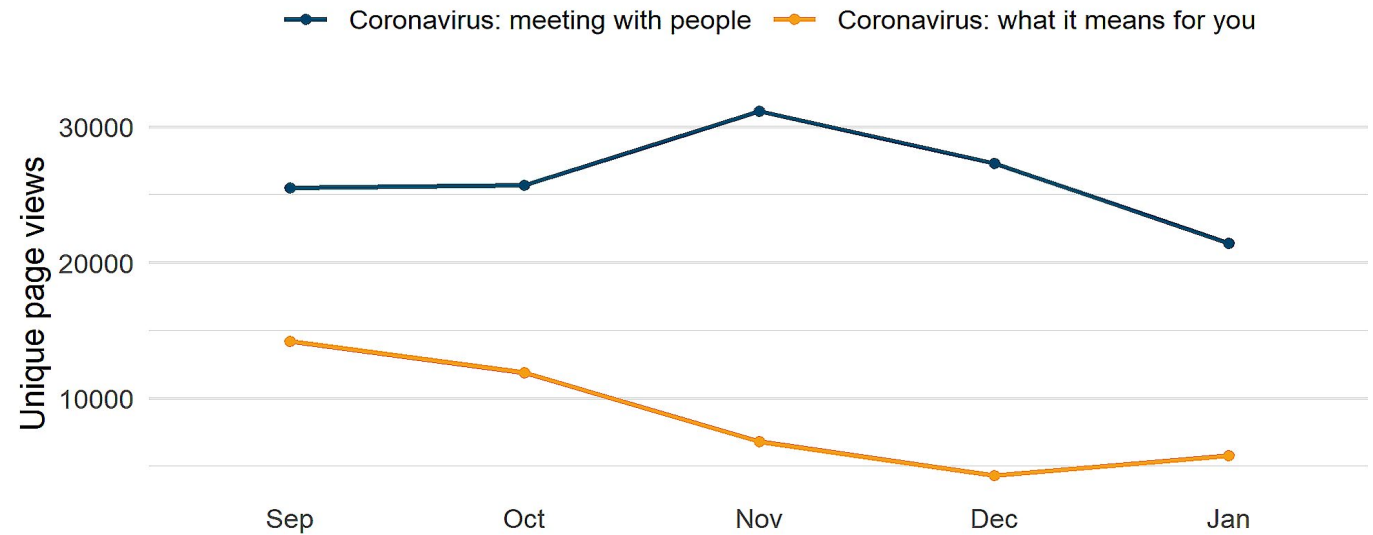
Chart 1: Monthly unique page views by page category



Coronavirus advice pages

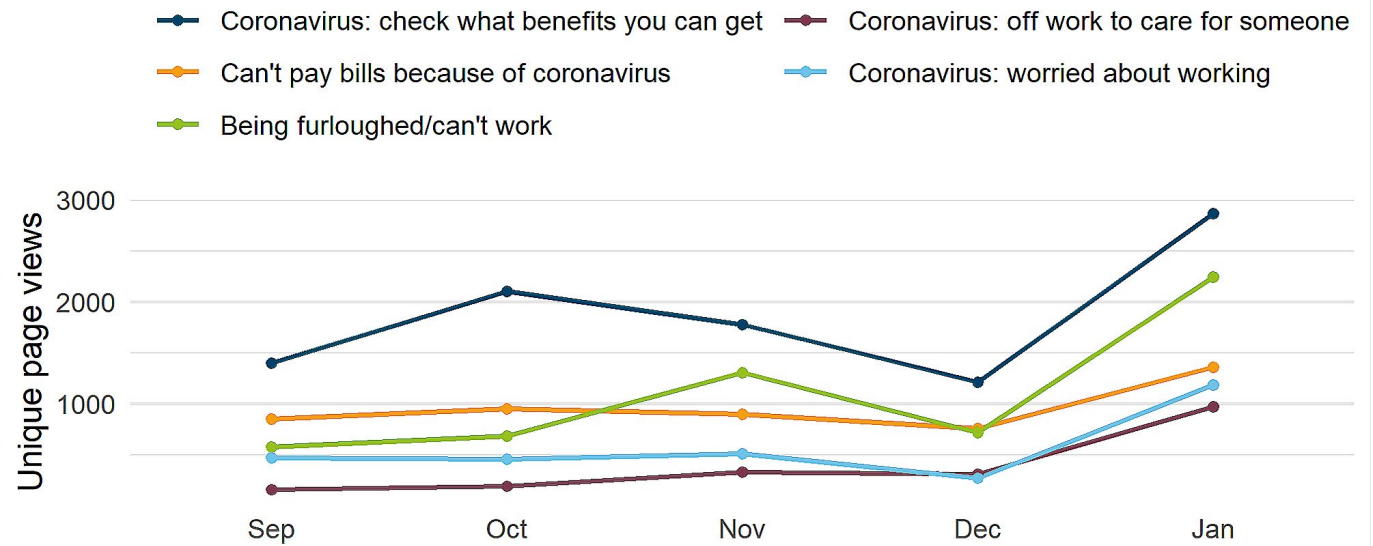
As shown in Chart 2 traffic to the advice pages specifically related to coronavirus increased in January with the only exception being the page about meeting with people which was understandably lower due to increased lockdown measures since late December.

Chart 2: Monthly unique page views for top two coronavirus-specific pages



As seen in Chart 3 relating to specific coronavirus pages, views of the pages relating to furlough and to available benefits increased more than others. This pattern is likely to be the result of the heightened restrictions announced in December, leading to an increase in concerns about work and income.

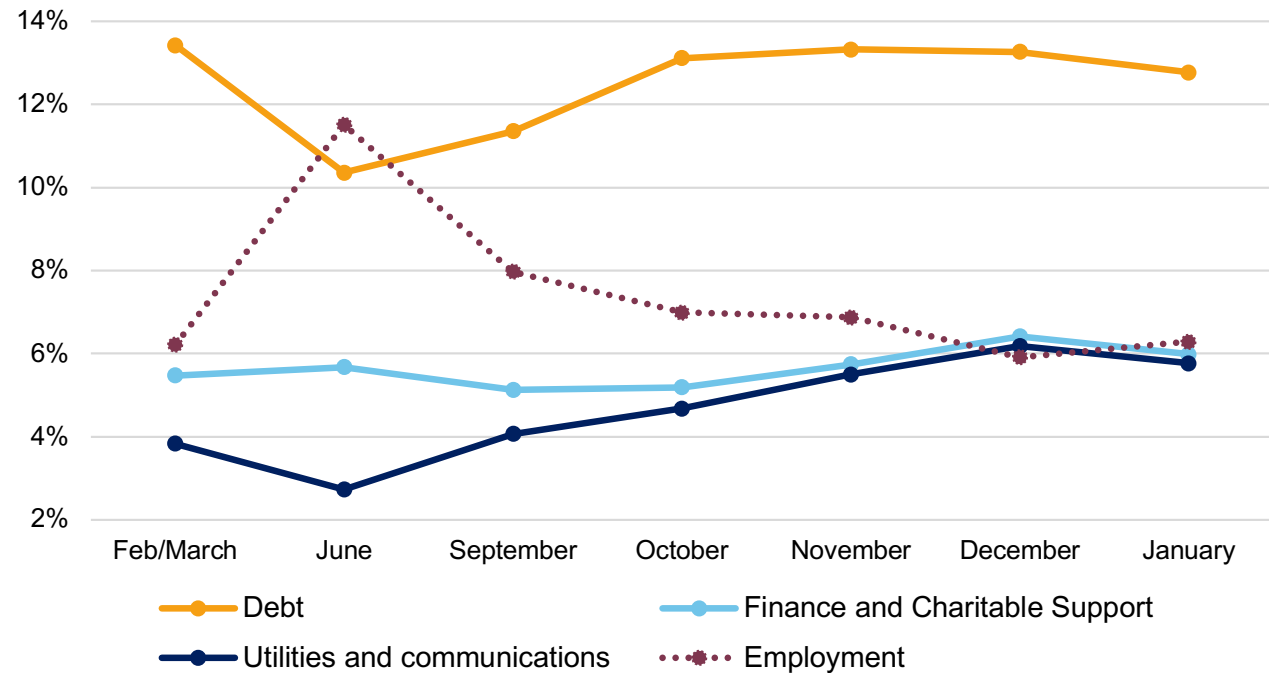
Chart 3: Monthly unique page views for other top coronavirus-specific pages



Advice needs at Citizens Advice Bureaux

Chart 4 may demonstrate the impacts of the current restrictions where an increase in the proportion of advice concerning employment issues can be seen. This has mostly been driven by an increase in advice sought relating to self-employment and health & safety at work.

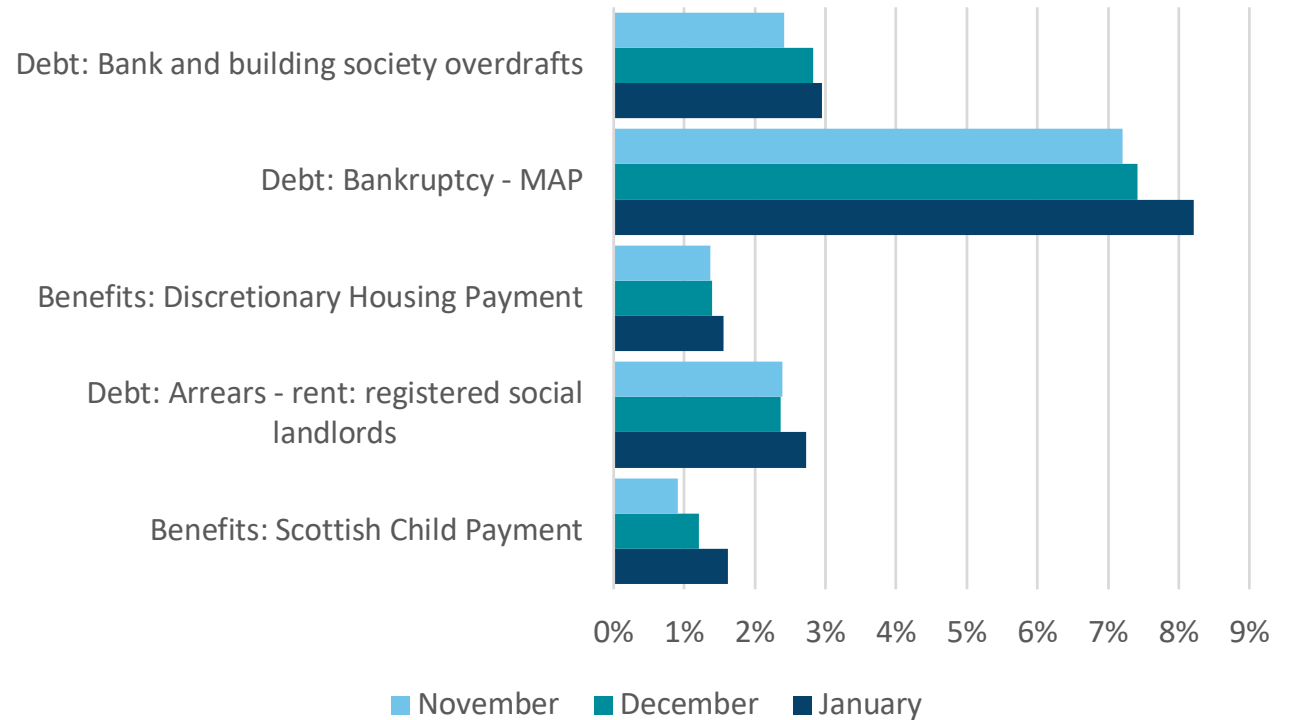
Chart 4: Top 4 Most common advice needs in January 2020 (excluding benefits)



Notable increases in advice sub-categories

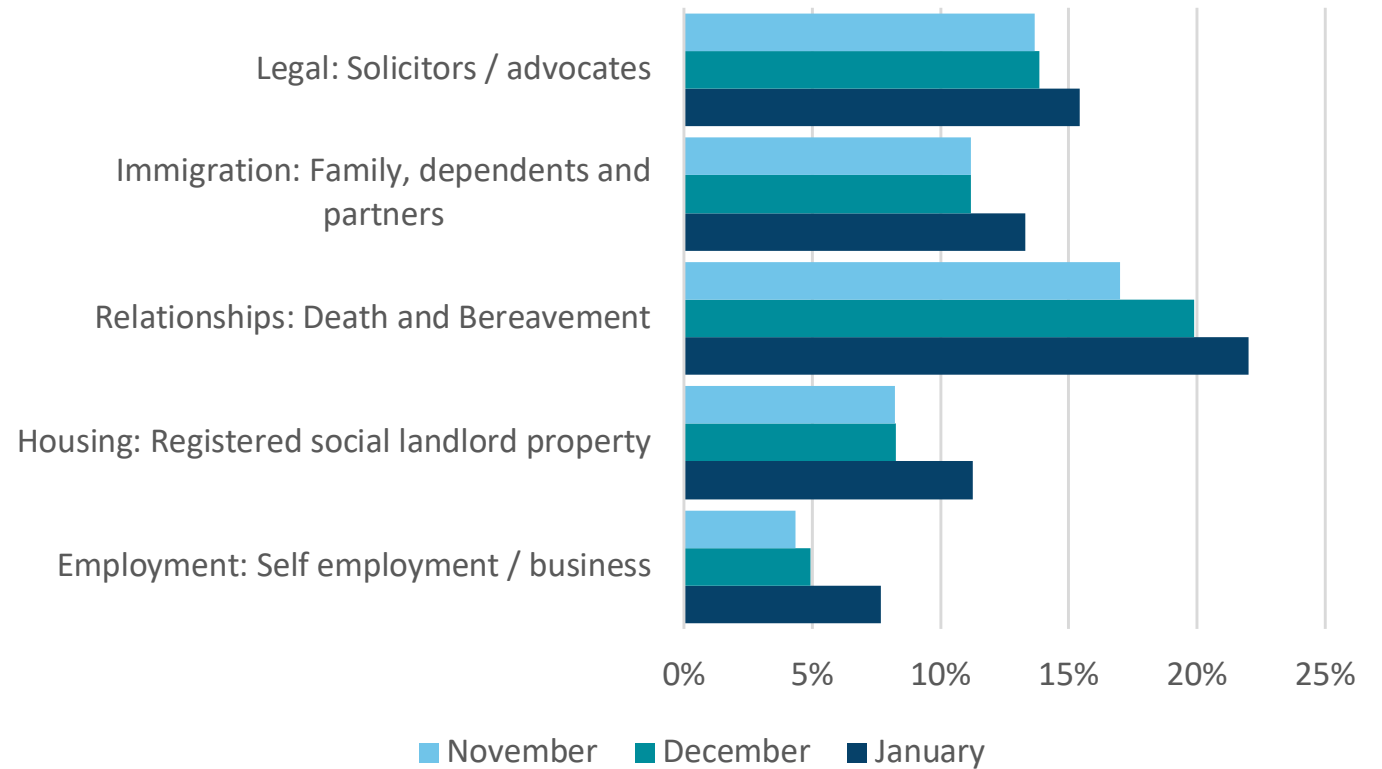
Charts 5a and 5b show the most notable changes in advice sub-categories viewed over the last three months.

Chart 5a: Debt and benefits sub-categories



The increase in enquiries related to self-employment is evident, with a particularly large increase in January.

Chart 5b: Other subcategories

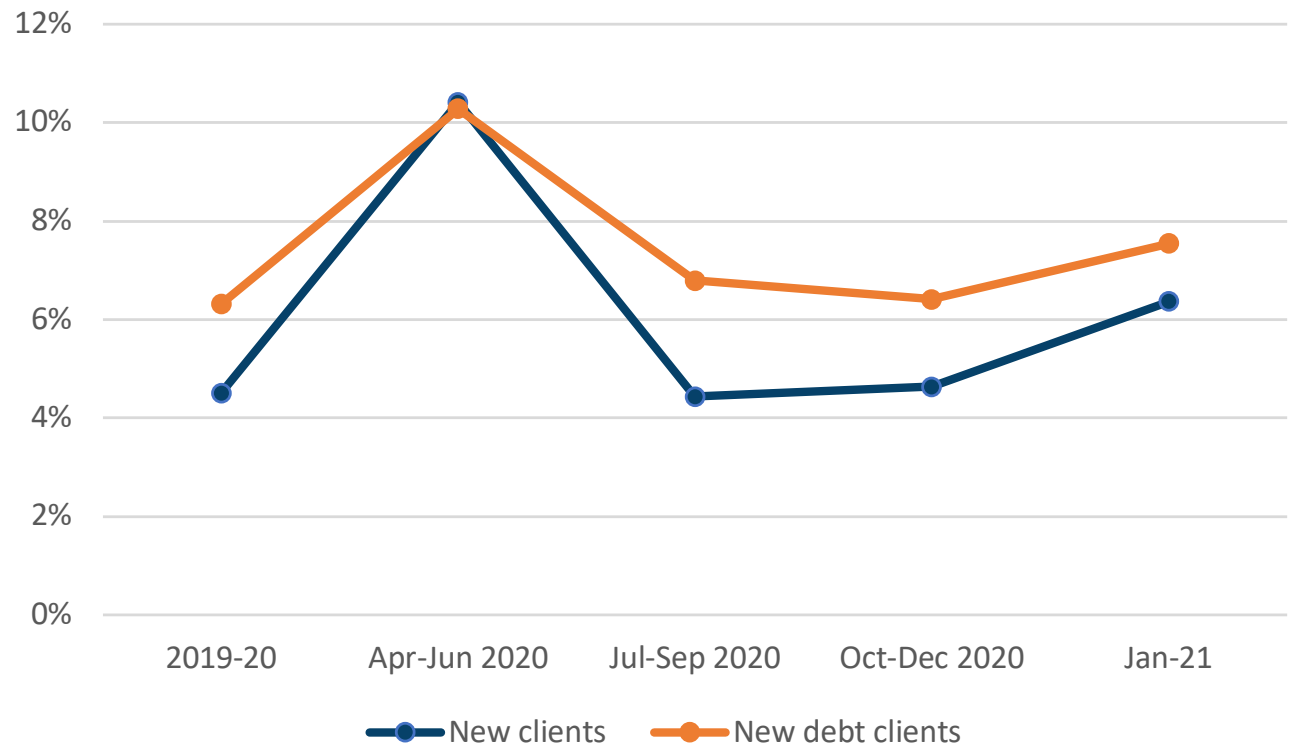


Changes in Advice sought in January

Increase in demand for self-employment advice

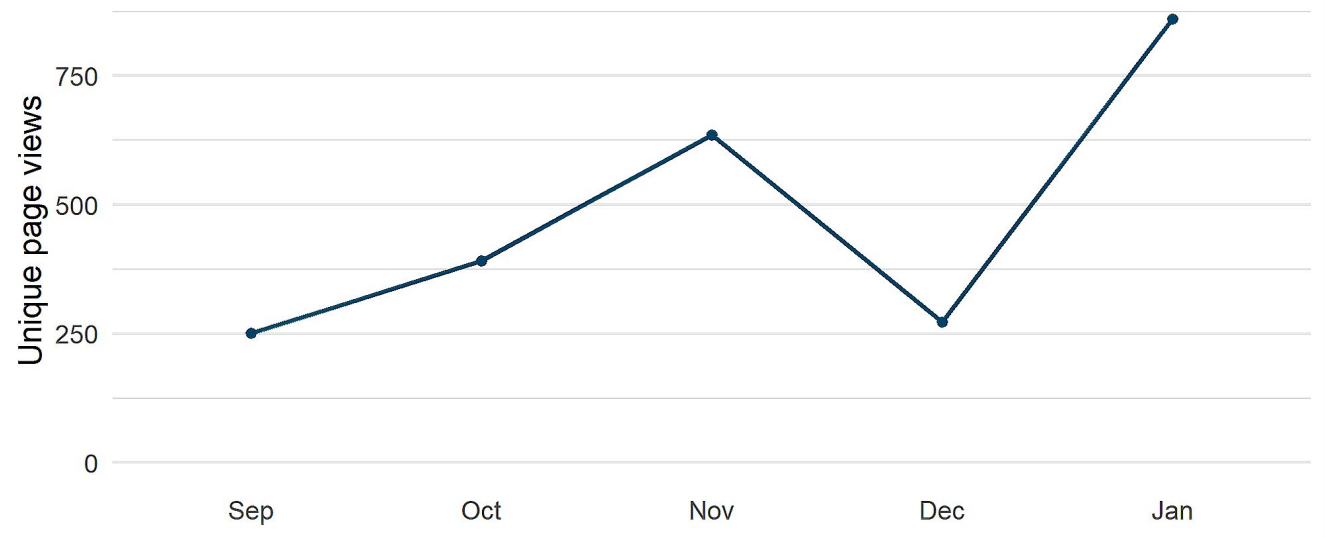
The period since the first lockdown has seen an increase in the percentage of first time CAB clients who are self-employed. During the first lockdown period around 1 in 10 new clients were self-employed. With the country now once again in heightened coronavirus January as seen this proportion increase again, albeit less dramatically so far as seen in Chart 6.

Chart 6: Percentage of clients who are self-employed – new clients only



This pattern is matched by an increase in the proportion of employment advice related to self-employment (Chart 5b), as well as a 35% increase in the number of views of the self-employment advice web pages when compared to November (Chart 7).

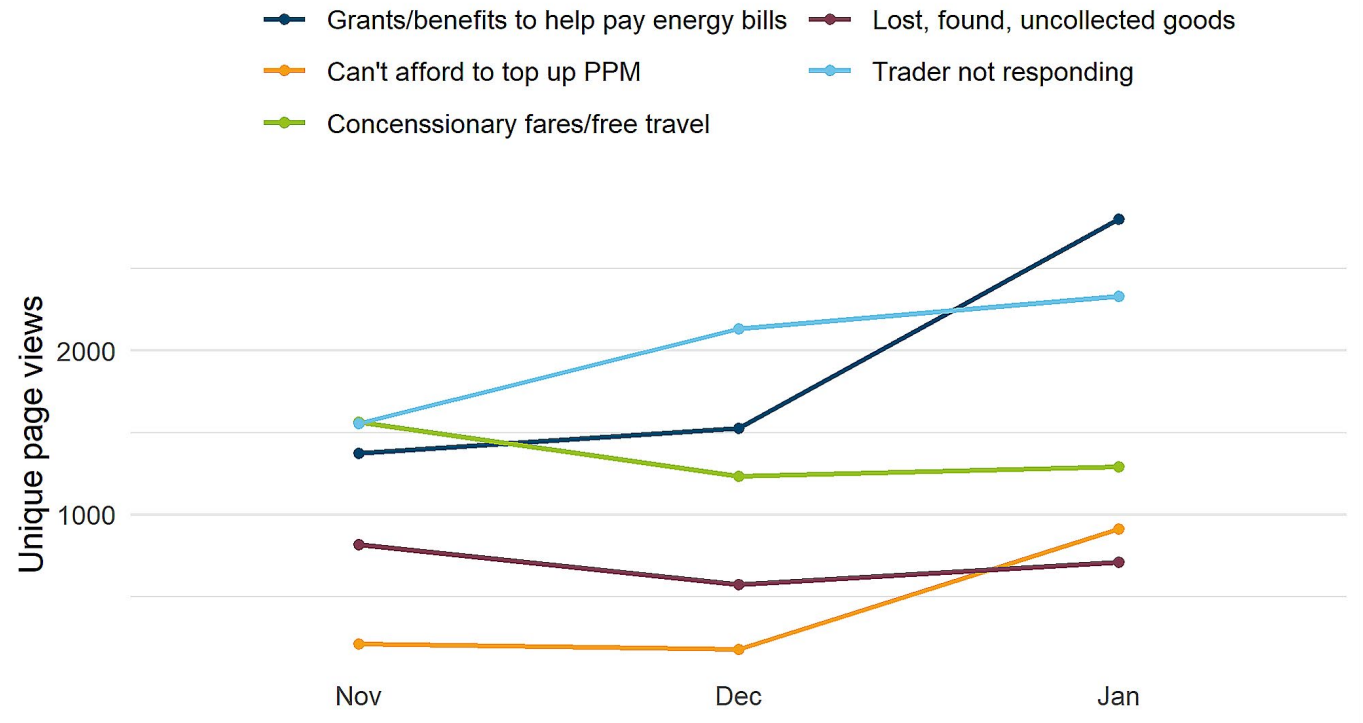
Chart 7: Monthly page views of [“Coronavirus: - if you’re self-employed”](#)



Increase in demand for advice on support with energy costs

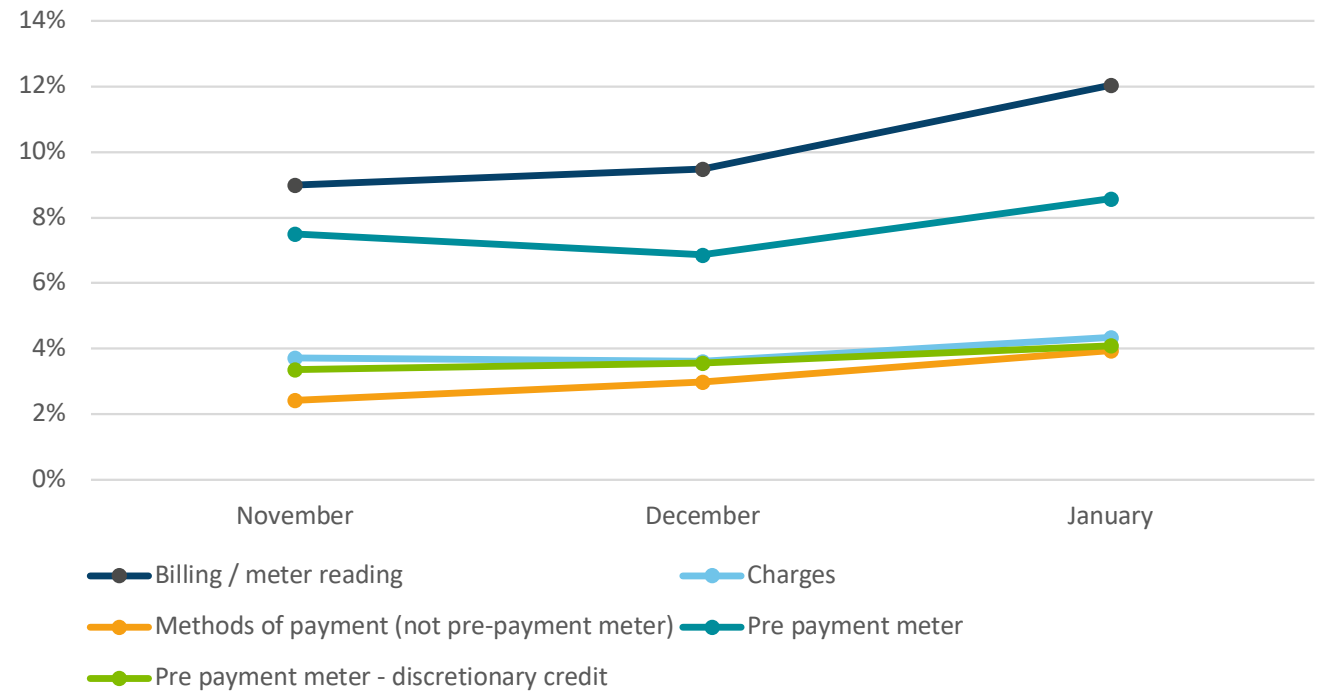
Chart 8 shows the top five pages in the 'Consumer' category of pages. The rise in traffic to energy related advice pages was expected given the successful launch of the Big Energy Saving Month campaign alongside an extended period of particularly cold weather. The two biggest rises in January are the pages relating to difficulty affording energy costs – ['Grants and benefits to help you pay your energy bills'](#) and ['You can't afford to top up your prepayment meter'](#).

Chart 8: Top 5 pages in the 'Consumer' category – monthly unique page views



Similarly, at CAB the energy advice topics that increased most as a proportion of all energy advice relate to billing, payments and pre-payment meters as shown in Chart 9.

Chart 9: Increasing energy advice topics at CAB




Who we are

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 peoples' 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.

The Citizens Advice network in Scotland is continuing to provide free, confidential and independent advice across Scotland during the coronavirus pandemic. Advice can be accessed through your local Citizens Advice Bureau which you can find at www.CAS.org.uk/bureaux. People can also access advice online through our public advice site www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Scotland or through Scotland's Citizens Advice Helpline which is free to call on **0800 028 1456**.

www.cas.org.uk

 [@CitAdviceScot](https://twitter.com/CitAdviceScot)

 [CitizensAdviceScotland](https://www.facebook.com/CitizensAdviceScotland)

Published March 2021

The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux - Citizens Advice Scotland. Scottish charity (SC016637) and company limited by guarantee (89892)