

CITIZENS ADVICE DISS, THETFORD & DISTRICT



citizens
advice

STAKEHOLDER NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2018

Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter bringing you up to date with our activities during the last few months

Marion Morse, MBE.
Chair

Work in Diss and Thetford - our core services

Our new presence in Thetford is busy and we continue to raise our profile in the town.

Benefits, debt, Housing, Employment and Family Relationships are our key enquires. In addition we now have a regular service in the DWP office in Thetford, supporting clients who need our services, both in the short term, if they have problems setting up a benefit claim and in the longer term, where they may need advice on managing their money effectively.

The community in Diss, despite appearing affluent has many problems. Two of the issues we are seeking to address are food and fuel poverty. This year we noted the increased use of the Food Bank in the Diss Community

Centre next door to the Bureau and the clients visiting both places for support and advice.

We have met with the foodbank representative at Diss and also we have liaised with the foodbank in Thetford. We now have good communications established with both foodbanks and our supervisors (ASS's) are registered with the electronic referral system, which also facilitates help with fuel in the form of vouchers. We have learned that rural clients using heating oil - a group that it has been very difficult to help in the past - can access help towards ensuring a small supply of up to 100L of heating oil, if they are in desperate need. One of the Foodbanks will also deliver food to clients in their homes. We have reached agreement with Thetford Foodbank that we will keep a limited number of pre-packed food parcels on our premises at the Abbey - some for single people and others for families - to ensure that clients have access to food when the Foodbank is closed. Thetford Foodbank is entirely volunteer-run and is only open on a Friday evening and Saturday morning. Also we have established that there is another food outlet at the Salvation Army in Thetford and have received details of locations in Thetford, where free cooked meals are available on each day of the working week. In addition, we have received

information from NCC Social Services of help available through the Children in Need project to help purchase essential items.

Our AGM, this year, was held in the Diss Community Centre. As always we were pleased to welcome both the Mayors of Thetford and Diss. The supportive comments from both the Mayors at the meeting were well received. Our Annual Review was presented to the meeting. Those who came also enjoyed tea and cake afterwards in the Bureau office.

The Broader Picture

This year our newly appointed Deputy Manager, Becky Chapman attended, along with two volunteers Shirley and Pat our National Conference and Annual General Meeting. This gives the opportunity for all member Bureaux to contribute to the development of the Service nationally and to learn from others how they are faring in a difficult funding climate. Here she talks about the conference and her reactions to it.

Citizens Advice Conference 2018

The theme of this year's conference was 'Building the Future Together' and sessions were themed around the areas in the proposed strategic framework,

'Future of advice'

The framework:

Advice - how we'll help people, how we'll work together to deliver the support that people need.

Advocacy - the way we'll influence - making sure our voice is as powerful as possible in an ever changing world.

Sustainability - how we'll stay resilient - staying competitive and securing income to deliver the services that people need.

Technology - how we'll get the most from new technology - improving and developing support and advice platforms to deliver the best possible service.

Culture - the way we work and who we want to be - creating a collaborative and diverse service, built around our clients.

I attended the following workshops and discussions:

- **Open leadership - our relationship with the National Association.**
- **Influencing in the face of funding cuts**
- **Helping everyone adapt to new technology**
- **Giving our people the right skills - Training for the Future**
- **Citizens Advice at 80 1939-2019**

Some of these workshops were better than others. However, I did come away with something from each one, even if

it was a productive discussion with a colleague rather than the content of the workshop.

I attended the opening plenary where the principal speaker was Polly Mackenzie, Director of Demos. We were shown a short film at the beginning of the session, which I have since shared with everyone in the Bureau. The film set a positive tone for the rest of the conference, as it focused on our clients and how we have helped them. At the AGM the new National Chair of Trustees, Warren Buckley was introduced. He seemed committed to the service and I think we will see positive changes with him in post. I also attended the awards ceremony, where it was great to see local bureaux being applauded for their achievements.

Throughout the conference there are opportunities to visit the exhibition and support spaces. I talked to Payplan and the Money Advice Service and got some useful information about training opportunities. One of the most useful things for me was to be able to talk to the national team, particularly with regard to technology and training. In the support space I spoke to the developers of CASEBOOK and was able to ask very specific questions about how things work and what changes I would find useful. I also got an early peek at the new system which will replace Prinkk (our poster/flyer creating system) which looks a lot more useable.

During the session 'giving our people the right skills', I was able to talk to the Director of People Strategy and Culture, Liz Church, who facilitated the session. I voiced my concerns about the increasing number of systems we are being asked to use, and asking our volunteers to use. My thoughts were echoed by many of the other training managers at the event.

I very much enjoyed attending Conference with Shirley and Pat,- two of our volunteers, and being able to take a step back and view the organisation as a whole for a couple of days. I also enjoyed meeting, and talking with, the other local officers and hearing about their experiences and sharing ideas. What was very affirming is the level of commitment to the core values that is obviously held by everyone throughout the Citizens Advice service.

Social Media Developments.

Diss, Thetford and District Citizens Advice is now live on Twitter!

If you are a Twitter user please follow us at [@DissThetfordCA](https://twitter.com/DissThetfordCA)

We will be using the platform to promote our service and to share relevant information with our followers. If anyone has any questions about it please contact me initially by email :

Becky.chapman@cadat.org.uk

Working with other Bureaux

We work with other Bureaux in both Norfolk and Suffolk to develop and improve our services. We note that with the retirement of Mandy Lewis, the Manager of Citizens Advice Mid Norfolk that Mid Norfolk is considering merger with Citizens Advice Norfolk. There have been a number of Bureaux agreeing to merge in Suffolk. We will also be affected by the proposed funding cuts in Suffolk, as we provide a service in Eye. Accordingly we will have to manage our funds very efficiently if we are to continue to provide our service at its present level.

Our Volunteers

Our volunteers provide a high quality service and keep themselves up to date with regular training. In addition some who have volunteered with us to gain work experience have left because they have a job! Our congratulations go to Paul Mullarkey and we thank him for all his work with us and we wish him every success.

The Thetford team have continued to develop our service at the Abbey centre. The numbers of clients continue to grow as do their problems.

Our Services to clients

Our specialist services, such as Help through Crisis and our work with the Big C charity mean that we have developed a wide range of specialist expertise.

Debt issues and Welfare benefits enquiries are an important element in this work.

What we are finding is that the problems clients bring to us are increasingly complex and varied. Our statistics, produced from CASEBOOK, and confirmed by our National Association show us that locally each individual client that we see, needed help with between 4-5 issues each. Nationally the average is 3 issues per client.

Our Pension Wise service remains busy, with appointments often booked 3-4 weeks in advance. We were able to recruit an additional Pension Wise Guider in the Summer to help us to keep up with the demand.



For more information about this work or if you want to refer a client to Pension Wise please telephone [01379 658205](tel:01379658205).

New Funding

Our Energy advice project work is to continue.

This year we've started working with the UK Power Network to help them to support their most vulnerable and fuel poor energy customers in Norfolk and North Suffolk.

We will assist people with a range of support including checking energy tariffs, accessing grants, smart meters, energy debt, switch energy suppliers, joining the priority services register and applying for the warm home discount. Our services will include one to one support as well as talks to community groups and frontline workers.

For any volunteers or frontline workers interested in learning more about energy advice, we are offering another training session in the afternoon of Monday 4 February 2019 at Abbey Community Centre, Thetford.

To book your place or find out more contact Caroline Mackinson, project.coordinator@cadat.org.uk 01379658200

And finally and as always, but especially at this time of year

To our funders and supporters both individuals, local councils and charitable organisations, our thanks for their support and good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

If you wish to make a donation to our cause please call into either of our offices, telephone - 01379 642291 or send a cheque to Shelfanger Road, Diss, Norfolk IP22 4EH

Visit our website on www.cadat.org.uk

We offer telephone advice on **0344 411 1444**, and e-mail advice on advice@disscab.cabnet.org.uk and we can also arrange to Skype with you.

Bureaux opening times

Diss office

Shelfanger Road, Diss

Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m

Thetford office

Abbey Neighbourhood Centre, Exeter Way, Thetford, IP24 1EE

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays 9.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Harleston

Harleston Information Plus, 2 Exchange Street, Harleston

Wednesdays - 10:00 to 12:00

Loddon

Loddon Library, 31 Church Close, Loddon

(by appointment only)

Wednesdays - 10:00 to 12:00

Eye

Eye Health Centre, Castleton Way, Eye

(by appointment only)

Thursdays - 9.00 to 11.00