

CANS Bulletin - March 2024



I am thrilled to bring you the latest updates and accomplishments from Citizens Advice North Somerset (CANS) in our inaugural external stakeholder newsletter. Over the past 12-18 months, our dedicated team has tirelessly worked towards enhancing our services and expanding our impact in the community.

We have, with the support of North Somerset Council, re-established the Advice Shop in the Sovereign Shopping Centre, and re-opened 18 in-person outreach services across North Somerset, working closely with our Town and Parish councils, Foodbanks, and other partners to ensure our advice and support services are imbedded in our communities, where people need us most.

Our volunteers remain integral, delivering exceptional services through telephone, email and in-person channels. Our paid staff team has significantly grown from 30 to 56 paid staff, demonstrating our commitment to meeting community needs. We have invested in entry level positions, with the aim of 'growing our own' and I'm proud to say, this has proved to be incredibly successful with a number of colleagues moving into technical roles, supervision and management positions.

We are delighted to share our success: securing additional funding for our Macmillan Advice Service, our continued involvement as a delivery partner for the national Help to Claim service; and funding from the Money and Pension Service for debt advice, all of which showcase our ongoing commitment to supporting our community.

We are also pleased to announce a new Welfare Rights service through the Improving Lives Through Advice (ILTA) which is a five-year funding programme delivered by The Access to Justice Foundation and The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It is designed to support the delivery of free legal advice to marginalised people and communities. This is all with thanks to the National Lottery players for making this possible.

CANS continues to receive Legal Aid funding to deliver the Housing Court Possession Desk at Weston Courthouse and we have successfully secured the new Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service, working in partnership with the Local Authority and Housing Associations to keep people in their homes.

Our Social Prescribing Services, in collaboration with Alliance Homes, have experienced significant growth. We now deliver these services across all GP services within Pier Health PCN, further integrating support into the healthcare landscape.

The development of our North Somerset Together Virtual Hub proof of concept in partnership with the Locality Partnerships, Local Authority and the North Somerset Wellbeing Collective is a testament to our collective commitment to innovation. This platform is proving its worth by efficiently navigating individuals to the social welfare services they need.

We continue to fly the flag for Equity, Diversity, working closely with many community groups. We believe that our common humanity makes us equal in worth, dignity and rights. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

You will also hear from our Data, Insights & Impact Team, showcasing our wealth of data, and particularly the impact the cost-of-living crisis continues to have on local residents.

As we reflect on these achievements, we are grateful for the support of our stakeholders. Your continued partnership empowers us to make a positive impact on the lives of those we serve.

With all good wishes,

Fiona Cope ~ Chief Officer

North Somerset Cost of Living Dashboard

Britain is still facing its biggest cost-of-living crisis in decades. At Citizens Advice, we've seen more people coming to us for help with crisis support, energy problems and not having enough money to make ends meet than ever before. National Citizens Advice have [created a dashboard](#) to share insights from across England and Wales showing how the crisis is affecting the people we help. To understand what's happening locally for people in North Somerset we have also created a [Citizens Advice North Somerset dashboard](#) that will be updated monthly.

An introduction to our teams at CANS

Impact Team



Welcome to the first newsletter from the Impact Team! We have collaborated with our colleagues across CANS to put this newsletter together and will be delivering it on a monthly basis going forward. Our aim is to highlight the breadth of work we do so that professionals working across North Somerset can signpost people who need our help to the right team, in a way that works for them. We welcome any input you may have about what would be of interest to you in forthcoming newsletters via comms@nscab.org.uk.

Our team is responsible for communications, equity, diversity & inclusion and data insights. We're behind a wide variety of things such as our new [website](#) which launched last year, building and maintaining links with the d/Deaf community through attendance at the

Communication Cafe and sharing monthly data insights via our [Cost of Living Dashboard](#).



Generalist Service

My name is Sam and I'm the Advice Services Manager for the generalist service, including outreaches, at CANS. My team is made up of both paid staff and volunteers. We are generally the first port of call for most clients that come into CANS service for help.

We provide general advice on multiple issues such as: benefits, debt, employment, family, housing, energy, immigration, legal processes. For consumer issues we signpost clients directly to the national [Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline](#) for specialist information. For benefit checks when a client is in receipt of no benefits, or not yet claiming Universal Credit, we signpost clients to the national [Citizens Advice Help to Claim service](#), as they are able to complete a benefit check with the client and help them to claim Universal Credit if appropriate.

We can help by:

- Advising them on their options
- Signposting them to relevant information and letter templates so they can self-help
- Completing forms for clients, including when applying for benefits or challenging decisions
- Acting on a client's behalf when needed

We are accessible via phone, email, and in-person each week at our Advice Shop in the Sovereign from Monday to Wednesday and Fridays (excluding bank holidays and seasonal closure between Christmas and New Year). We have outreaches across the county, which you can find here: <https://nscab.org.uk/where-to-find-us/>.

Please feel free to refer any potential client to us, with their consent, through our webform, which can be found here:

<https://nscab.org.uk/get-advice/>.

Appeals Team

Whilst our Generalist deal with form filling as well as challenging benefits decision, we also have a dedicated Appeals team who are able to assist with cases up to Upper Tribunal level. This encompasses decisions on disability benefits, overpayments, entitlement challenges and other issues.

We work with clients through face to face or telephone appointments to advise on their cases and where applicable, fill in the requisite challenge forms and necessary paperwork for tribunals.

We appreciate that the social security system and entitlement to benefits can be overwhelming and difficult to understand. We aim for our clients to gain a better understanding of their entitlement and to feel empowered going forward, following our involvement.

Macmillan Team

Our Macmillan team offer a confidential advice service to those living with cancer and other life limiting conditions as well as their relatives and carers. This focuses on advice surrounding issues such as benefits and income maximisation as well as other related issues like housing, debt and employment.

We want to ensure that those impacted by a diagnosis feel supported in minimising the financial impact a diagnosis can have.

The team is able to help those receiving treatment at Weston General Hospital or Bristol hospitals living in both the North Somerset and North Sedgemoor areas.

Housing Team

CANS hold Legal Aid Agency funding for providing advice on housing and homelessness to eligible clients. We also hold a HLPAS contract for providing a Duty Desk Scheme at the Weston County Court to advise and represent defendants on housing possession claims in addition to providing Early Advice for those at risk of losing their home. We also receive funding from NSC for our housing loss prevention worker who provides advice on housing related issues such as benefits and debt.

Money Advice Team

Citizens Advice North Somerset helps people who have debt and money problems and provides advice on the options available to them. Advice and support is available via email, telephone and face-to-face services. CANS also works in conjunction with Wessex Water who have a variety of schemes to assist those on low income or who have fallen into arrears with their water bills. Our First Steps team assists eligible clients with council tax debts.



Social Prescribing

Hello from the Pier Health Social Prescribing Team!

The Pier Health Social Prescribing service is a partnership between Citizens Advice North Somerset and Alliance Homes for Pier Health Group in Weston-Super-Mare.

Our team of Link Workers are assigned to the eight Pier Health GP practices across Weston, Winscombe and Banwell. Referrals are received directly from the GP Practices and The NST Virtual Hub. The Link Worker holds appointments with the referred patient and offers short- to medium-term support and guidance to help them improve their wellbeing.

Our team of 6 full time equivalent link workers, connect people to activities, groups and services in their community to enable them to meet their own practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing.

The photo above is some of our lovely team, along with The Virtual Hub, at a wellbeing day at Uncle Paul's Chilli Farm last year.

The Virtual Hub



Beverley Wadley, Operations
Manager



(left to right) Letty Anderton,
Community Wellbeing Navigator,
Alex Burgoyne Team Leader,
Lucy Johnson-Taylor Community
Wellbeing Navigator

The North Somerset Together Virtual Hub is a collaborative signposting and service navigation pilot project that was set up in November 2022 with CANS as the lead agency. It has been live since May 2023 and we started by taking referrals from GPs and now cover all 3 PCNs in North Somerset. To date, we have helped over 250 people!

We work closely with Social Prescribing teams across North Somerset and CANS have also referred clients to us through an online webform. We have most recently linked up with the Mental Health Integrated Network Team (MINT) and our next step is to open the service out to Adult Social Care. We will then eventually start taking calls/referrals from the general public.

Alongside helping clients engage with local services/groups we have been building a huge database of knowledge about what's on in the communities of North Somerset and services available to people. We work on the personalised care approach of "what matters to me" and can offer a holistic assessment over the phone, to gauge how best to help the client and ensure smooth and secure referrals. We hope to expand our team so we can continue to help as many people as possible in North Somerset!

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