

**citizens
advice**

**Lewes
District**

ANNUAL REPORT



2024/25

www.lewesdistrictca.org.uk





REPORT OUTLINE



1. Overview
2. A word from our Chair
3. CEO Report
4. Service Delivery Review
5. Quality & Governance
6. Financial Statement
7. Our Thanks

WE ARE LEWES DISTRICT CITIZENS ADVICE

We empower individuals in our local community to find a way forward through their problems and help them enforce their legal rights by providing high quality, impartial, independent, confidential advice and information that is free to all

We use the information we gather through our services to influence local and national Government policy to improve people's lives

OUR VISION

Is to be a local charity that promotes a fairer Lewes District, where its people have access to free, impartial and accredited advice and support to enable our community to thrive and flourish

The service is priceless. So very helpful and Informative. The person was patient, understanding, she listened and heard what I was saying. Thank you very much



INFORMATION ASSURANCE

Our trustee board oversee the information security of all personal information that is processed on behalf of our clients, staff, funders and strategic partners

Our local offices hold joint responsibility for client data that is held in our case management system, with the national Citizens Advice Service

An information assurance management team exists to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal and sensitive data is maintained to a level which is compliant with the requirements the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018



Just massive thank you, for the time, for the great advice for understanding and the knowledge. I truly appreciate this service



A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR



Later in this report our CEO, Sarah Archer and other colleagues have eloquently provided insight into the service our organisation provides to Lewes District, the way we work, our successes, challenges and ambitions for the future, so there is no need for me to go into any detail here.

However, there are just a couple of projects I would particularly like to highlight which clearly demonstrate the inclusive approach of our Vision to promote a fairer Lewes District and empower individuals in the community to find a way through their problems by providing high quality, independent and confidential advice.

In the spring we completed the first year of our Rural Outreach Advice Service providing drop-in services to local communities in the district and with agreement from the Big Lottery this is being expanded into Lewes. Earlier in 2025 we launched our new Autism Advice Service. Working in partnership with Brighton and Hove Citizens Advice to have wider reach, this service is designed to bridge a growing gap in specialist advice and advocacy for autistic people.

I would personally like to express my thanks to the whole team of staff and volunteers who have contributed their time and expertise to support more than 2000 people across the district. It is a credit to their commitment and dedication that we can reach these numbers and our ambition is, of course, to do more to meet the growing demand. This year too we have had to ask more from the team to help us make the necessary adjustments to our financial planning and very much appreciate the professional way this was conducted.

Particular thanks go from me to all the members of the Trustee Board, especially to the newer members who have dived right in and got to grips with their areas of interest be that Research & Campaigns, Business Planning or fundraising and EDI. We are a small team responsible for leading the strategic decision making; good governance and financial oversight in a way which allows everyone else to remain focused on delivering a great service.



Our challenge, along with many other charities and businesses, remains long term financial sustainability. We continue to be hugely grateful to our grant providers, the District and Town Councils and we value their commitment and engagement with what we do. In addition we have received funding from The Big Lottery and financial contributions from many other local organisation, who are recognised on our 'Thanks' page.

Our five-year Fundraising Strategy to deliver diversification of income streams is ongoing whilst we recognise that this becomes harder given the high and growing level of applications to a limited number of grantors.

The future landscape is looking more than a little unsettled. Whilst we recognise we must be nimble in adapting to changing circumstances, develop new ways of working including productive and long term partnerships, our prime focus must be our current and future clients; being there when they need us and ensuring we maintain the quality and consistency of our service.

Alison Lawfield





CEO REPORT

We have seen exciting operational developments and, most importantly, outstanding outcomes achieved by our dedicated team, who continue to support some of the most vulnerable people across the district.

Every day we witness the devastating, cumulative effects of deepening economic hardship on our clients. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis, compounded by the legacy of the pandemic, has left many already struggling families and individuals facing impossible choices. Soaring housing costs, alongside rising fuel and food prices, are plunging those living hand-to-mouth into even more severe and inescapable levels of poverty.

Against this backdrop, our expert team provides a lifeline five days a week—empowering local people to understand and enact their rights and supporting them to find lasting solutions to their problems wherever possible. We know the level of help required by many of our clients is high. That is why we do more than just provide information. Our advisers offer practical, skilled, and sustained follow-up support: completing benefits applications, writing supporting letters, guiding clients through appeals, and preparing them for tribunals.

This is a holistic, wraparound service, rooted in professionalism, empathy, and compassion. It is delivered by a remarkable team of staff and volunteers, whose commitment vastly increases our capacity and impact. Our volunteers are truly invaluable: they extend the reach of our service and enable us to change more lives for the better.

We are also proud to be guided and supported by our wonderful Board of Trustees, led by Alison. Collectively, they bring a wide range of skills and experience, providing the strong foundation on which our work is built. Their insight and leadership are the bedrock of the charity.

In 2025 we were proud to launch our new, innovative *Autism Advice Service*. This service was co-created with people with lived experience from the very beginning, ensuring it reflects the real needs and priorities of autistic adults. It is designed to bridge a growing gap in specialist advice and advocacy for autistic people, many of whom face barriers in accessing appropriate support elsewhere. This project is delivered in partnership with Brighton and Hove Citizens Advice, allowing us to share resources, expertise and have wider reach. 8



Alongside this, our Rural Outreach Advice Service continues to take advice directly into local communities—running dedicated drop-in sessions in areas where people are most likely to experience inequity of access. Rurality can present additional barriers such as transport, isolation, and fewer local services, so this outreach work ensures that no one is left behind.

Together, these projects reflect our commitment to delivering accessible, inclusive, and responsive services, meeting people where they are and ensuring that specialist advice is available to those who need it most.

We had our three-year Leadership Self-Assessment audit in March 2025. A huge piece of work, but valuable and insightful, it covered: governance, operations, people management, finance, strategy and planning, risk management and compliance, research and campaigns, EDI and of course, our advice and case work accreditation.

This was a massive team effort and I would like to extend my gratitude to every single person in the LDCA team, everyone's high quality work contributed to us securing green marks across all 54 individual scoring areas within the evidence portfolio—which was described as 'gold standard'. This year we additionally applied and received accreditation for working with people with disabilities and in 25/26 we will be working towards achieving a 4th accreditation in providing dedicated housing advice.

Over the past financial year, we have supported 2400 people across Lewes District, addressing a wide range of issues from benefits and housing to employment, and family challenges. Together, we secured over £800,000 in additional income and financial gains for our clients, helping many to stay in their homes, heat their properties, and put food on the table.

Beyond the numbers, our work has given people the confidence, knowledge, and resilience to move forward with their lives. From supporting a client through a successful disability benefit appeal, to helping a family avoid homelessness, or to ensuring a family doesn't go hungry—each outcome represents a life changed for the better.

We are immensely proud of these achievements, and grateful to our staff, volunteers, trustees, and funders for enabling us to continue providing a service that is free, independent, confidential, and impartial—a vital safety net for our community at a time when it is needed most.

A huge team effort and one to be celebrated

Sarah Archer

FUNDING

Lewes District Council continued to support our work and granted us three years funding from April 25-March 28. This is a vital income source in running the organisation and we are incredibly grateful for this core grant. We have also been well supported by many of our town councils

Lewes Town Council
Peacehaven Town Council
Seaford Town Council
Telscombe Town Council

We were successful in generating extra resources and in this reporting have been supported from a range of additional funds which included:

- The Lottery (Reaching Communities)
 - ESCC
- Sussex Community Foundation
 - Assert
 - Chalk Cliff Trust
 - The Lawson Trust
- The Next Foundation
 - Lewes Rotary
 - Seaford Rotary
- Lewes Town Council

For every £1 invested in LDCA there is a return in public value of £19.70

We are now in the second year of our five-year Fundraising Strategy. This strategy provides us with a clear roadmap to diversify our income and secure a balanced mix of funding sources. By doing so, we aim to maintain our current services, respond proactively to emerging and future needs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the charity.

A central priority is to achieve full cost recovery wherever possible, so that projects are properly resourced and sustainable. Alongside this, we continue to focus on increasing levels of core, unrestricted funding, giving us the flexibility to adapt, innovate, and meet local people's needs both now and in the years ahead.

Despite our ongoing fundraising efforts this year, a gap remained between our income and expenditure. To address this, we undertook a careful review of our service delivery and restructured aspects of our operating model. This inevitably had an impact on some staff members, as cost savings were required and formal consultations took place. We are deeply grateful for the professionalism, openness, and commitment shown by our staff throughout this difficult process. Thanks to their engagement, we were able to restructure teams in a way that safeguarded our core services while achieving the necessary savings.

With these changes in place, we are confident that LDCA is now on a stronger and more sustainable footing for the years ahead, ensuring we can continue to provide vital support to local people when they need us most.

This year we were fortunate to have a stand-out, adventurous fundraiser in our team – Sharmila. Sharmila is one of our dedicated volunteer advisers and is always ready to challenge herself with once-in-a-lifetime endurance experiences. In March, she took on her biggest adventure yet: trekking to Everest Base Camp. Throughout her journey we kept in regular contact, sending messages of encouragement and support and getting updates on her progress. Her determination and generosity embody the spirit of our volunteers and demonstrate the powerful impact individuals can have when they choose to go the extra mile for their community.

Mike Hannay (ASS) gratefully receiving a donation from Seaford Rotary Club (helping towards replacing our outdated IT equipment)



The year ahead

Significant changes lie ahead in the political and local government landscape. Devolution and the creation of new Unitary Authorities will reshape how services are governed and delivered across Sussex. From May 2026, following the first Mayoral elections, the newly appointed Mayor will lead the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA). This strategic body will hold wide-ranging powers over transport, housing, skills and employment, the economy, and environmental and climate change policy for the whole Sussex region.

Alongside this, Councils have been consulting on proposals for the geographical boundaries of the new Unitary Authorities. While it had initially been anticipated that the whole of Lewes District would remain within the East Sussex County Council footprint, Brighton & Hove City Council has put forward four alternative proposals to extend their boundaries into parts of our district.

Final submissions from each Local Authority are due to be made by the end of September 2025, with decisions expected from central Government either at the end of 2025 or early in 2026. The outcome of these proposals could significantly alter our operating landscape, with the new Unitary Authorities formally taking power on 1 April 2028 (vesting day).

We will continue to monitor developments closely and ensure that the voices and needs of the people we support are heard throughout this process. Whatever the outcome, LDCA remains committed to adapting and evolving, ensuring our services continue to reach those who need them most.

Our Ambitions

Looking ahead, we are committed to building on our successes and responding to emerging needs within our community.

We have clear ambitions to extend our Autism Advice Service to support not only autistic adults but all neurodivergent adults. This innovative service, co-created with people with lived experience, has already demonstrated its impact, and we are now seeking funding to expand its reach and ensure more people can benefit from this much-needed specialist support.

We also aim to adapt our services to engage more young people under 30. Our research has shown us both the challenges and opportunities in reaching this group, and we are ready to take action. With young people embedded in the service design and delivery from the outset, we will create a service that feels relevant, inclusive, and accessible to them.

Collaboration will continue to be at the heart of how we work. As a member of Citizens Advice East Sussex (CAES), we are part of a strong partnership of four Citizens Advice charities, working together across East Sussex. We are also working closely with colleagues across Sussex to explore new models of collaboration at scale. As funding increasingly moves towards a regional focus, the ability to work collectively and apply for resources across larger geographical areas will be essential—and we are already preparing for this future change in the funding landscape.

RESEARCH & CAMPAIGNS



We have been extremely lucky to have a dedicated Research and Campaigns volunteer team supporting our work, led by trustee, Emma Kolkman. I'd like to extend our gratitude for the fantastic contribution they have made. Together, we developed a work and development plan for 2024/5, helping direct and track our work priorities.

Key areas have included:

- Produced a Cost Of Living report for East Sussex [LDCA CoL report 2024](#) (Dec 24)
- Hosted a Q&A with one of our MP's, James MacCleary (Nov 24)
- Pension credit campaign to increase uptake (Sep 24)
- Tracking LHA rates with local availability and communicated this to key stakeholders (monthly)
- Research and published our report on working with and engaging young people (May24)
- Engaged with all candidates in the run up to the general election - Addressing living standards and a call for action (June 24)
- Launched TikTok and produced several short films aimed at younger people (summer 24)
- Produced a Vox Pop on what the general public understand about LDCA (summer 24)
- Surveyed 30 letting agents in Newhaven, Seaford and Lewes on LHA rates and turned this into a report
- Quarterly R&C reports produced for board meetings (on-going)



SPOTLIGHT ON FLOORING

The removal of flooring at the end of tenancy - a campaign for the coming year

In the social rented sector, it is common for housing providers to take out carpets before new tenants move in - even if they are in perfectly good condition. Landlords usually justify this on health, safety and hygiene grounds. Tenants must then find and fit their own carpets at their own expense. Not only is this a large expense for people, who are often already financially struggling, it is also extremely environmentally unfriendly.

By law UK landlords only have to put flooring in kitchens and bathrooms. This does not extend to the rest of the property. According to The National Centre for Social Research, 760,000 social housing tenants are living without flooring in all rooms.

Over the years we have had a number of clients coming in about this exact issue and during the R&C Conference back in April, Bristol CAB talked about their reclamation scheme. This inspired the R&C team to see if we could recreate something similar. Bristol CAB are kindly sharing their learnings and resources with us.

Our campaign for 25/26 is to work to raise awareness and campaign for change. We are hoping to use our connections at Lewes District Council to help initiate a long-term policy change, requiring landlords to put flooring all rooms of the property or requiring them to offer the old flooring to the new tenant before they move.



SPOTLIGHT ON HOUSING

Local Housing Allowance Rates vs. the Rental Market in Lewes, Newhaven and Seaford

Housing remains one of the most pressing challenges for residents across Lewes District, consistently the second most common issue brought to our service. A chronic shortage of affordable and suitable homes, combined with intense competition for limited rental accommodation, creates a harsh rental landscape. Financial support through Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is failing to keep pace with real market rents, leaving many households struggling.

Our Research & Campaigns team compare LHA rates with average rental prices in Seaford, Newhaven and Lewes, assessing both affordability and the availability of properties within these limits. The findings show that, even when a claimant is eligible for LHA and a property exists at that price point, there is no guarantee of being accepted by a landlord.

To better understand this, we surveyed 30 local letting agents across the three towns. The most frequent response to why landlords are reluctant to rent to people on benefits was blunt: *"landlords don't have to."* This highlights the entrenched barriers faced by low-income renters, even when financial support is theoretically available.

LDCA IN NUMBERS



26 % of our clients were seen in person



55 % of clients were helped over the phone



31 % were supported over email



4 % were helped in other ways, such as a video call, or letter

- Last year we helped 2190 clients with 6563 issues
- We enabled over £800,000 in financial gains
- Personal Independence Payments were the most common benefit requiring support
- Council Tax Arrears was the largest debt issue
- 63 % of people accessing support have a long-term health condition or disability (18.8% of residents were identified as disabled in the 2021 census)
- 8% of our clients identified as being Asian, Black, mixed or other (compared with 5.8% in the 2021 census)
- Our in-house energy advisor additionally supported 212 people, with over 3000 differing issues.

**The person that gave me
advice was excellent and
helpful.
Outstanding**

CLIENT CASE STUDY



Housing Benefit Overpayment

The client lives alone in council property and is currently unable to work due to ongoing health conditions and following treatment for cancer. The client is in receipt of UC with the limited capability for work related activity component and housing element.

The client would like to move closer to her family.

The client received an invoice for £923.35 in 2025 from Lewes District Council (LDC) for a housing benefit overpayment relating to the period 2018/19.

The client was very concerned and upset by the invoice as she believed that she had repaid the invoice and provided salary information to the council at the time to enable a correct calculation of benefit.

The client was now unable to repay the amount, due to the change in her health and employment/ financial circumstances. The client had tried to resolve the issue with the council but had been unable to do so.

Citizens Advice reviewed the client's paperwork attached to the case and confirmed with the client that she had made repayments for the HBOP invoice, but because they had been paid to her rent account, and not the account for the invoice, they had been refunded fully to her by LDC, and the invoice amount remained outstanding.

To support the client with the repayments, Citizens Advice submitted a discretionary housing application on behalf of the client and the client was awarded £306.00 towards the invoice by LDC.

Request for write off

Citizens Advice requested a 'write off', of the remaining figure of £617.35, based on the client's health issues/hardship, and the previous mismanagement of the account. The write off for the remaining outstanding figure was awarded by LDC.

Financial Support

Citizens Advice provided the client with a HUGGs supermarket voucher from the Household Support Fund.

Feedback from Client

The client was very relieved that the matter had been resolved, and that, with the debt cleared, she would be able to request a council house transfer to move closer to her daughter.

'Hi Helen Thanks for your email and all your hard work.'

CLIENT CASE STUDY

Case Worker team

This client explained was diagnosed with ADHD as an adult in 2017. He also has an eating disorder and severe anxiety. He describes an abusive childhood and a period of being street homeless before being housed in a hostel and eventually social housing.

He was first helped by our caseworker in 2020 during the Covid-19 “lockdown” by telephone. He had made a claim for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which had been refused scoring 0 points on all activities. Our caseworker wrote to the DWP on the client's behalf requesting a Mandatory Reconsideration and arguing the client had entitlement to PIP standard rate daily living component. The DWP reconsidered and revised the decision awarding PIP standard rate daily living component avoiding an appeal.

This client had a PIP award review in 2022 with a decision in December 2023, and was scored 0 daily living and mobility points and his PIP payments stopped. The client was seen in a face-to-face appointment and our caseworker requested a Mandatory Reconsideration, the decision was reconsidered but not revised. Our caseworker then lodged an Appeal with HMCTS, prepared a submission on behalf of the client and represented the client at an appeal hearing (June 2025). The Tribunal allowed the appeal awarding PIP enhanced rate daily living component and standard rate mobility component from 22/12/2022 to 21/12/2028. The client received a backdated PIP payment (from December 2022) of £12,608.60 and going forward paid £139.60 a week

SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW

Our volunteer and staff team bring over 240 years of Citizens Advice experience. We have 32 volunteers and 16 part-time paid staff members delivering 52 adviser days per week.

Demand is high across all channels: staff and volunteer capacity is stretched; issues are complex and multi-faceted.

Our volunteer team deliver our local Adviceline 3 days per week providing quality assured advice and information on a broad range of issues. Demand for our Adviceline service remains high; we strive to recruit and train enough volunteers to enable us to extend opening times to include Mondays, Fridays and an evening session.



We've worked hard to increase our face-to-face delivery of services through in-depth pre-booked appointments and a growing network of drop-in sessions. While we can't currently offer regular drop-in sessions in our offices when we are at capacity delivering appointments, Adviceline and responding to out of hours enquiries, we are pleased with our progress in increasing to 26% face-to-face delivery (up from 21% in 2023-24).

Our outreach work focuses on in-person advice delivered in the heart of communities. Our long-standing Peacehaven outreach session switched from appointment delivery to a drop-in service with a volunteer recruited to support smooth running of the session due to demand. Our rural outreach service has been operating since May 2024 delivering across 7 village venues. Recently we have been able to add Lewes Town foodbanks to further broaden our reach.

An Energy Adviser joined us from Hastings Citizens Advice delivering specialist energy advice from April 2024-March 2025. This project supported 216 additional Lewes District clients supported with 3,543 cases and recorded £10,364 in income gains.

Quality assurance is central to our advice offering. We are AQS accredited to deliver advice with casework in welfare rights and disability. To maintain this our advice is subject to robust audit and quality assurance processes giving us the confidence that our advisers are consistently delivering high quality advice to secure the best outcomes for our clients.

Volunteering



We have a small training team able to offer 3 training days per week. This comprises delivering training sessions to volunteers joining the service and supporting them until they are signed off practice trainees delivering accredited, quality assured advice. The training team also supports the development of our existing team members eg upskilling from Level 1 (information and admin) to Level 2 (advice), from Level 2 to Level 3 (in-depth advice for complex issues). Volunteers can specialise in advice areas or specific roles such as benefits form filling. The training team also supports volunteers who transition into paid-staff roles.

Volunteering in numbers

In 2024-25 we recruited 17 new volunteers to a variety of roles; most in advice (Level 1 and Level 2 advisers) and we welcomed a marketing volunteer to our team. We developed a new outreach Level one volunteer role to support accessibility of our busy Peacehaven outreach drop-in sessions.

In Lewes District our incredible volunteers donate approximately 9,000 hours per year with a calculated value, in terms of activities and improved outcomes, which include developing skills and improved wellbeing, of £9,561 per volunteer per year.

Volunteer wellbeing

We are committed to the wellbeing of our team and know the importance of supporting our volunteers. The dedication they show, the commitment to the cause and the stories they hear on the front-line of advice services can take their toll. That is why we have invested in team wellbeing via our Lottery funded volunteer coordinator. We are in the final stages of the process to become accredited as a Bronze Award organization under ESCC's Wellbeing at Work initiative promoting healthy habits and supporting team members with their physical and mental health. We run quarterly wellbeing focused social events such as sound bath sessions, walks and picnics. Cost cutting initiatives across the national organisation Citizens Advice led to network-wide access to the wellbeing platform Togetherall being discontinued. Our volunteer coordinator has taken on this work within LDCA becoming a trained Mental Health First Aider and offering on-demand mental health support to the volunteer team.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion continues to be at the heart of our organisation and underpins everything we do. Over the past year we've worked hard to build a more diverse and representative staff, trustee and volunteer team—one that reflects the communities we serve. We've increased representation across ethnicity, age and those lived experience. Particular attention has been given to engaging younger people and those from underrepresented backgrounds, to ensure our services are more accessible and inclusive. This work is ongoing and central to our commitment to equity and belonging for all.

We are committed to embedding client voices and lived experience at the core of our service delivery and planning. Over the past year we've strengthened our approach to gathering meaningful feedback through client stories, quotes, and structured feedback mechanisms. These insights are regularly shared with our team to celebrate impact and ensure that the voices of those we support shape the way we work. We also use this feedback not only to raise awareness of our outcomes but also to identify areas for improvement, enhance accessibility, and ensure our service is responsive to the evolving needs of our communities.

Sophie Hoffman

I would like to send you all my heart felt gratitude for receiving such fabulous help, I definitely could not have done all this without your super support as always and this is from the bottom of my heart.

VOLUNTEER VOICES

Saima: While pursuing my university studies, I decided to become a volunteer to help others and truly make a difference in people's lives. A refreshing break from my studies, volunteering has been incredibly rewarding, and the team have been so welcoming and supportive! I wholeheartedly recommend this experience to anyone who wants to feel more connected and is eager to help their community.

Talita: One of the reasons I decided to join (LDCA) was because I was looking for more volunteer and work experience opportunities, especially since graduating uni. And since finding Citizens Advice (...) I really found that their aims and their impact statement really aligned with what I was looking for. I've been really wanting to broaden my knowledge about what is going on in my community and seeing if there's any way that I can help, whether that's directly or indirectly. I think it's important to understand what the most pressing issues are for the people around you and what's impacting your society the most. And I think being able to volunteer for Citizens Advice has really helped sort of broaden my knowledge on that and add deeper insight onto those pressing issues.

"I think it is really important for volunteers to feel supported and it's great that you can offer this type of support. I will certainly let you know if I need to talk about anything, as you say, we sometimes deal with a lot of other people's emotions and frustrations so it's good to know that support is out there"

"Thank you so much for your support and for being so welcoming. I am really proud of what I have learnt and continue to do each week. It's nice to be part of such a great team, I'm really enjoying the role"

"Today, I accepted a full-time position that begins tomorrow. Sadly, the hours conflict with my volunteering commitments. I want to thank you for being such a fantastic team. I have genuinely enjoyed my time volunteering and truly appreciate all the support I have received. I am very grateful for this opportunity, and if I ever get the chance to volunteer with you again in the future, I would love to do so."

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Join Hattie for a Day in the Life of a Lewes District Citizens Advice adviser



VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering not only provides significant economic value but also enriches the lives of volunteers and strengthens communities, making it a vital component of LDCA's mission. Volunteering at Lewes District Citizens Advice is estimated to be worth approximately **£300,000** for the year 2024 to 2025. This value encompasses various aspects, including:

Time: The time contributed by volunteers is valued at approximately £230,000.

Skill Development and Employability:

Volunteering enhances skills and employability, contributing around £12,000.

Health and Wellbeing: The positive impact on health and wellbeing is valued at about £60,000.



Service review

Casework and housing

The Welfare Rights caseworker team have had a busy year supporting our clients to secure their entitlement to welfare benefits. The team has continued with their work advising and acting for often vulnerable clients with complex benefit issues up to and including successfully representing them at Tribunal. They have also assisted many clients with the move from legacy benefits to Universal Credit under the managed migration process. Many of these clients would have struggled on their own and there are few places left where they could get practical help with the move onto Universal Credit.

In April 2025 the caseworker team had their Advice Quality Standard accreditation renewed. In addition, they applied for and have been accredited to provide benefit casework in the area of disability for the first time. To gain accreditation they had to demonstrate that their work met the Advice Quality Standard criteria and provide examples of their casework for audit.

The team also wrote a detailed response to the Government's Green Paper "Pathways to Work" which was submitted as part of the Government's consultation on Welfare Reform.

"I couldn't have managed this without your help. I also found your help reassuring and it helped to reduce the stress that I felt. I can't thank you enough for your help!"

"We wanted to say how much we appreciated the time and guidance that you gave us for our PIP appeal and Tribunal. It really was such a huge help for us".



We also launched a new dedicated housing advice service in June 2025 to support the high volume of increasingly complex housing enquiries we receive.

Secure housing is a basic right and one which underpins wellbeing, stability, and access to opportunity — yet remains out of reach for many in our community.

We plan to go through the in-depth process of seeking the casework standard from AQS over the next 12 months

" My adviser Helen was kind, caring, non judgmental, understanding with a positive attitude which gave me hope for the future. I am truly grateful for her support. "

" They helped me with the steps to find disability / protected housing. "

Outreach

This year we have prioritised improvements to ease access to our service focusing on rural isolation, digital exclusion and the additional barriers presented for autistic adults in accessing support services.

Our rural outreach team currently deliver drop-in sessions at 9 (and counting!) venues across Lewes District including Chailey, Ringmer, Barcombe and most recently, Lewes town foodbanks. Service users and community groups alike tell us this work has had a positive impact on local residents.

In Peacehaven, our longstanding advice session moved to a drop-in service, hosted and funded by the Town Council in the heart of the community in Meridian House. We have been able to see 3-times more local residents with this change. We recruited a Peacehaven resident to support the session as a Level One volunteer, a first point of contact available to manage the flow of enquiries and provide signposts where appropriate.

These services deliver over 70% of work face-to-face, embedded in the local communities we serve, tailored to those who need support.



" I was in such a muddle and you can't talk to anyone! It's been wonderful to come and get help face to face "



Thank you for the incredibly positive impact this is having on the rural community in East Sussex.' Social Prescriber, The Foundry Lewes.

We recently hosted a first anniversary celebration and client advisory session for our Lottery funded Rural Advice Project– a joyful event which brought into sharp focus the impact of timely and accessible advice. We would like to extend our thanks the venues and partners involved in supporting and promoting this project.

Autism Advice Project

We launched our innovative Autism Advice Service in February 2025. Working in partnership with Brighton and Hove Citizens Advice, delivering multi-channel advice services to autistic adults across Lewes District and Brighton and Hove.

The project aims to support clients with Autism 19 years or older, with or without a formal diagnosis, to assist them access advice where they may have disengaged or had difficulties accessing advice services otherwise.

This project has been proudly co-created with people with lived experience of autism and the challenges that can present when navigating life's issues. This initiative aims to serve as a model for wider rollout, addressing service gaps and reducing health inequalities for the growing autistic population in the South East.

The project aims to improve financial inclusion, wellbeing, and knowledge of rights, empower clients to navigate systems with confidence and reduce stress, isolation, and poverty risk.

54 people were referred to the service between February and August with approximately 70% of enquiries relating to benefits. Housing is the second highest area of need.

Clients present with a range of complex issues including benefits, housing, employment, consumer as well as a need to signpost to other services and themselves have communication difficulties, mental health difficulties.



" I wanted to say thank you so much, I was at my wits end and really could not have done it without you. Things are much easier for me now. "

Citizens Advice East Sussex (CAES)

Citizens Advice East Sussex brings together four independent local Citizens Advice charities, Lewes District Citizens Advice, Eastbourne Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice 1066, and Wealden Citizens Advice.

Collectively we provide free, confidential, independent, impartial advice and support to anyone who needs us across East Sussex. We deliver a range of county wide services including our winter readiness work, keeping people warm and well. We have also jointly delivered pension credit campaigns across the county, raising awareness of entitlements and supporting people to apply for access pension credit.

As local charities, we're deeply rooted in our communities. Our teams understand the issues people face in East Sussex and are here to help with everything from debt and benefits to housing, work, and everyday problems.



QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE

Excellent quality advice and strong governance are central to everything that we do. Our organisation carries the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) quality mark for general advice and working with disabled people. This extends to our welfare rights casework which is also AQS accredited.

The quality of our advice is scrutinised on a continual assessment basis; not only do our local supervisors check the work of our advisers at the end of each day but a random selection of advice cases is sent monthly for assessment against a national quality and performance framework to ensure that our in-house assessment scores match national quality standards. Separately, our caseworkers complete quarterly independent file reviews on each other's cases to national QAA (Quality of Advice Assessment) standards.

To maintain good governance, we are required to complete a rolling three-year Leadership Self-Assessment. This currently reports on 8 areas which are governance, strategy and planning, risk management and compliance; financial governance; people management; operational performance; research and campaigns (R&C) and equality diversity and inclusion (EDI). We assess ourselves internally in each of the areas and this is then validated by our trustees and an independent assessor from national Citizens Advice. In the third year, there is an in-depth external audit to make sure that the quality of our governance matches the quality of advice. The renewal of our AQS quality mark is dependent on passing this audit.

Following our year-three external audit in 2025 Lewes District Citizens Advice remains in the highest possible category for both quality of advice and the standard of governance. In this way, the public can be assured that when they are dealing with us they are in extremely safe hands.

Our current trustees are listed below with their area of interest where applicable

Gavin Haines – IT
Julia Hammond – Treasurer
Emma Kolkman – Research and Campaigns
Alison Lawfield – Chair
Colin McDonald – Business Planning
Kevin Powell
Jane Watling



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The figures on the next page are a high level extract from our full annual report with a comparison between 2024-25 and the previous year.

Total Income for the year 24-25 was £521k compared to prior year of £310k. This includes monies from the Household Support Fund and other funders, which is intended for onwards distribution to our clients according to the terms of the grants.

Reflecting on income specifically for our core activity of advising clients, this has increased from £280k to £468k helped by a Big Lottery grant for Rural Outreach Advice and a Volunteer Co-ordinator; funding for a new Autism Advice Service; and increased donations resulting from our fundraising activities. The increase is also significantly impacted by the time of receipt of funds with those received in this period but for future years carried forward.

Our core costs for the year have increased from £376k to £419k driven by wage inflation and additional staff to fill the new Big Lottery roles.

Consequently we have a net reported surplus in the year of £49k from our core activities. However, once adjusted for the £91k to be carried forward, this results in a deficit of £42k which was funded from our reserves. This was foreseen with the creation of a designated reserve at 31 March 2023 of which £40k was retained at 31 March 24 to fund the budgeted deficit.

It is our policy to maintain unrestricted funds which are the free reserves of the Charity at a level that can meet its financial commitments. It seeks to minimise risks by regularly reviewing the reserves policy and during the year the minimum level of reserves was held at 4 months.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Statement of Financial Activities for year ended 31 March 2025

Statement of Financial Activities for year ended 31 March 2025	Advising Clients			Funds for Distribution to Clients (d)	Total
	Unrestricted Funds		Restricted Funds (c)		
	General (a)	Designated (b)			
2025					
Lewes District Council main grant	190,000				190,000
Town Council grants	30,240				30,240
Other grants	675		210,581		211,256
Donations	18,189				18,189
Bank interest	8,196				8,196
Funds for distribution to Clients	10,180			52,900	63,080
Total Income	257,480		210,581	52,900	520,961
Employment costs	240,155		104,750		344,905
Other staff costs	6,048		2,893		8,941
Citizens Advice info services & publications	6,808		1,005		7,813
Office costs	16,330		6,911		23,241
Premises costs	24,013		3,545		27,558
Governance	5,473		808		6,281
Funds distributed to Clients				52,900	52,900
Total Expenditure	298,827		119,912	52,900	471,639
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	-41,347		90,669	0	49,322
Fund balances b/f at 1 April 2024	161,437	40,000	180	0	201,617
Transfers	40,000	-40,000	0	0	0
Fund balances c/f at 31 March 2025	160,090	0	90,849	0	250,939
2024					
Lewes District Council main grant	190,000				190,000
Town Council grants	38,580				38,580
Other grants	1,186		32,006		33,192
Donations	6,314				6,314
Bank interest	4,528				4,528
Funds for distribution to Clients	7,000			30,000	37,000
Total Income	247,608		32,006	30,000	309,614
Employment costs	226,203		69,770	781	296,754
Other staff costs	5,890		7,882		13,772
Citizens Advice info services & publications	6,835		1,005		7,840
Office costs	18,685		4,749		23,434
Premises costs	23,591		6,460		30,051
Governance	4,243		624		4,867
Funds distributed to Clients				44,426	44,426
Total Expenditure	285,447		90,490	45,207	421,144
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	-37,839		-58,484	-15,207	-111,530
Fund balances b/f at 1 April 2023	158,494	80,000	59,446	15,207	313,147
Transfers	40,782	-40,000	-782	0	0
Fund balances c/f at 31 March 2024	161,437	40,000	180	0	201,617

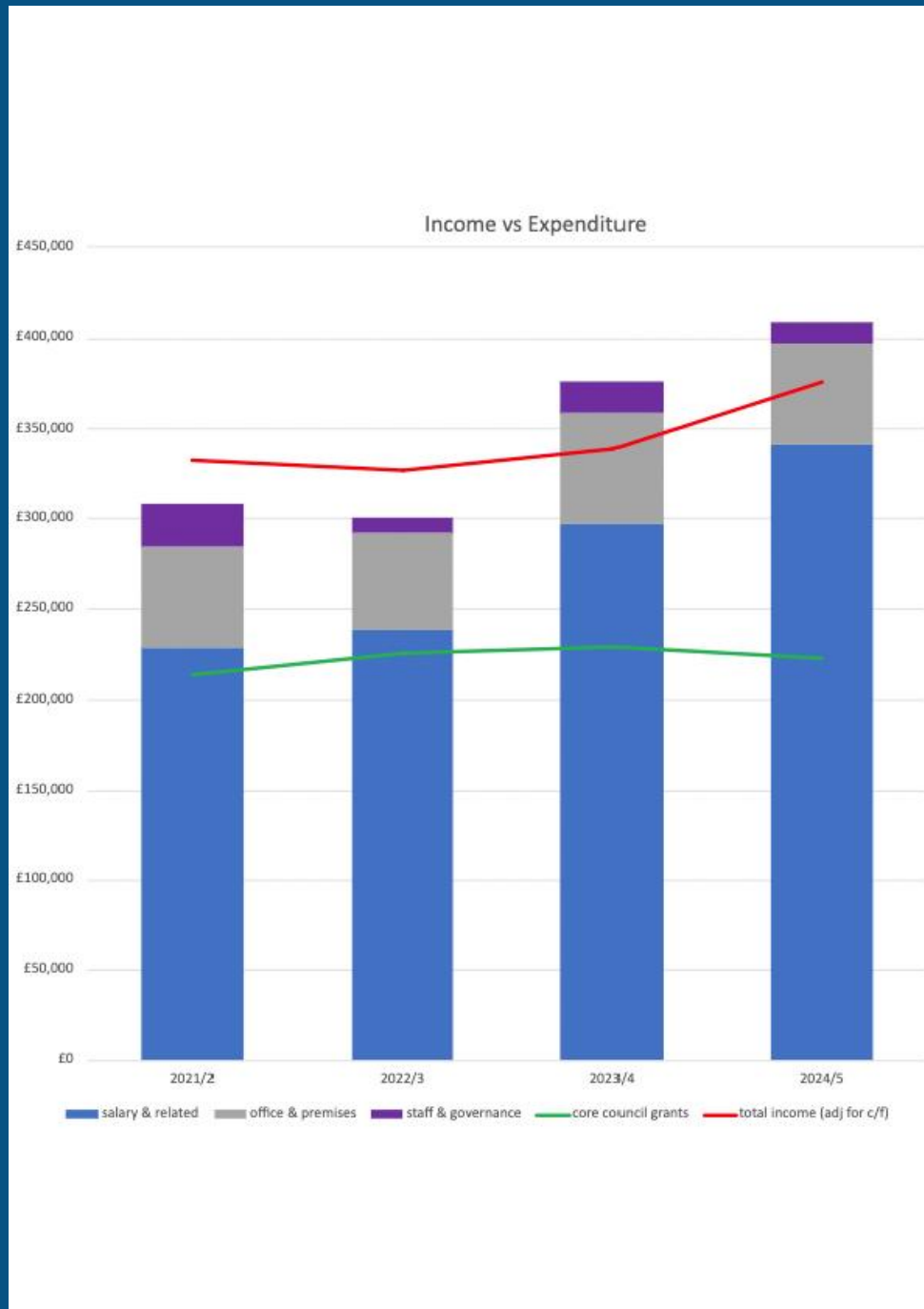
(a) Core

(b) Unrestricted funds set aside by Trustees to cover expected future year shortfall

(c) Includes funds for Additional Measures, Autism, Housing and Universal Credit advice, Urban Outreach, Volunteer Coordinator, marketing intern, IT support and training,

(d) Household Support Fund and Cliffe Feoffees

INCOME V EXPENDITURE TRENDS



This graph is a representation of the figures presented previously but extrapolated over a longer period. It visually clarifies the challenge of matching stagnating grants and inflationary pressures.

OUR THANKS

Special thanks to our wonderful team of volunteer advisors and operational support volunteers- without you all we simply could not deliver the vital support that thousands of local people access each year

Our staff team
Our trustee board
Our volunteer bookkeeper
TC Group for their support with our accounts and payroll
Our R&C team
Our digital team

LDC- as our core funder, LDC enable us to have a sound bedrock for much of our core running costs

ESCC
Peacehaven TC
Seaford TC
Lewes TC
Telscombe TC
Firle Parish Council
Sussex Community Foundation
FEOFFEEs
Chalk Cliff Trust
Lewes Rotary
Seaford Rotary
The Next Foundation
The Lawson Trust
The Lottery
Individual supporters

Our regional LCA'S, helping us elevate our work and impact

All our partners, supporters and colleagues from a huge range of teams and sectors

Thank you too to our service users who show our volunteers and staff respect and consideration





**Lewes
District**

Lewes Office

6 High Street Lewes East Sussex BN7 2AD

Newhaven Office

15-19 Chapel Street Newhaven East Sussex BN9 9PN

Seaford Office

37 Church Street Seaford East Sussex BN25 1HD

We also provide outreach advice in wider locations, including Peacehaven, Ringmer, Chailey, Bishopstone and Newick

www.lewesdistrictca.org.uk

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Follow Us on

