

The Advice Service's Evaluation Report

2023 - 2024



Excellent Service and has really helped me. Would recommend to anyone

Very Supportive and helpful. Takes a lot of stress off Carers

Fantastic service all round, can advise with a lot of different things

I wouldn't hesitate to ever pick up the phone and ask for your help, knowing that I would be talking to absolute experts in their field

my adviser was empathetic, informative, and extremely helpful. She gave me the encouragement and support to complete an application process that I found overwhelming at times due to my caring role. I am very grateful for my adviser's input.

Progress in the last year:

- We worked with 741 households (687 in previous year)
- We generated £1,481,198 for the households we worked with (£1,525,978 in the previous year)

Evaluation responses 2023-2024

The Advice Service asks people to complete an evaluation at the close of their case.

In addition, we completed an evaluation in March 2024 of anyone that we had worked with throughout 2023-2024 who still had an open case.

In total, we sent out 278 evaluations and received 93 replies. This is a response rate of 33%.

Satisfaction with the service remains high although there has been a slight drop in overall happiness with 87% of respondents reporting being happy or very happy (96% last year).

Respondents comment on the kindness, responsiveness and knowledge of advice workers. They note appreciation of feeling listened to, supported and how advisers were able to explain things clearly.

- *“Could not have been any more helpful, organised, knowledgeable, and kind. She was wonderful”*
- *“I have to say that my adviser was empathetic, informative, and extremely helpful. She gave me the encouragement and support to complete an application process that I found overwhelming at times due to my caring role. I am very grateful for my adviser's input.”*
- *My adviser helped make the process very easy and straightforward which is important for someone in a caring role who has so little time.*

Respondents often comment on how helpful it is that advisers reach out with gentle reminders when actions are needed.

- *I felt understood and would be reminded on things which I forgot in a sympathetic way.*

The positive impact of advice is clear. Respondents describe the improvement in financial wellbeing and reduction in stress as a result of adviser support. Two respondents describe the support as life- saving:

- *(The Service) Has made a great difference to me, my adviser sorted out my Pension Credit, I was a bag nerves, had bills lying, and getting the money sorted has meant I could pay my bills.*
- *I was supported to try and look after myself and that I was important in supporting others. My priority to myself was important.*
- *helped me to improve my financial situation. I was barely making ends meet and now I can go through the month with more peace of mind knowing that I can do my weekly grocery shopping and buy clothes for myself of my son with the peace of mind that I won't be in the red*
- *Very Supportive and helpful. Takes a lot of stress off Carers.*

Service improvements and quality plan progress year 2023-2024:

- **Aim 1: To maximise the numbers of people who provide feedback**
UPDATE: we reviewed our evaluation process and decided to send evaluations to everyone who has had a case open for 12 months plus (as well as those whose cases are closed). This resulted in an additional 18 responses.
- We have developed a process for people who need to use an interpreter to ensure they can take part in the evaluation process.
- We are working on an easy read evaluation
- **Aim 2: Continue to equip advisers to assist people through the Cost of Living Crisis** by training them in type I debt advice

UPDATE: Of the 13 advisers in the service, 7 have completed or started this training with Money Advice Scotland. Members of the team have also attended training run by the Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit.

- **AIM 3: To better respond to housing-related enquiries**

Update: Citizens Advice Edinburgh delivered housing training to the team in September 2023.

- **AIM 4: Continue to raise the profile of the Advice Service within the organisation** through regular communications

UPDATE: We attended TAG Talks events, the AGM, worked with the Communications team to share information on a wide range of topics and delivered benefits training for managers.

All comments received in response to evaluation 23-4:

Standard 1: The Advice Service is open and accessible

How happy are you that we meet this standard?

Very Happy 84%, Happy 11%, OK 3%, No answer 2%

Comments: Standard 1

- My Adviser was very friendly and helpful and was able to help me fully via phone and email.
- Very understanding of my situation.
- I left a message and my Adviser got back promptly with a friendly and helpful attitude.
- My Advisor was extremely friendly and helpful. We kept in touch by phone and email, but she always responded very quickly to my queries, and she was so helpful.
- It was a wonderful experience for me and my son David.
- Could not have been any more helpful, organised, knowledgeable, and kind. She was wonderful.

- Was very happy with the support.
- Always there when I needed her.
- Quick response to initial enquiry.
- My adviser is always helpful and explain things to me in a clear language.
- Our family was at time of crisis. We received confidential and professional advice. My Adviser was polite, professional.
- It was very good and was so easy to get hold of my Adviser.
- The whole process worked very well for me!
- Very Helpful, I really need his help in future.
- I don't remember how I got in contacted my Adviser, but I can say that he is a lovely gentleman.
- My Adviser made it so easy for me.
- Easily accessible.
- My adviser had a good knowledge of the services.
- Amazing.
- Living here for 17 years, English not good, thank you, so grateful.
- So Very Happy with the Service.

Standard 2: The Advice Service meets your needs at the right time

How happy are you that we meet this standard?

Very Happy 83%, Happy 10%, OK 3%, No answer 4%

Comments – Standard 2

- I had tried to claim Pension Credit and was turned down. I was a bag of nerves, and my Adviser has helped me, and taken this away.
- Having, understanding of my stressful situation I feel it was dealt with in difficult times. Things may have taken longer on my part, but I was never felt uncared for in my situation.
- I have been very happy about the service received.
- I have to say that my adviser was empathetic, informative, and extremely helpful. She gave me the encouragement and support to complete an application process

that I found overwhelming at times due to my caring role. I am very grateful for my adviser's input.

- The majority of the time for the meetings apart from once where I had to phone her after the agreed phone call time where she was going to call me to chat about a holiday grant, but I think she had been held up on another call beforehand, so I understood. My advisor responded to my emails very quickly and always kept in touch with me through the process for when I applied for different grants through the service.
- I was struggling financially with a lot at the time I began getting help and advice from my Adviser at the Action Group. She helped me in more ways I could have imagined and went beyond my expectations. I will forever be grateful to her, and the Service the Action Group provided me.
- My adviser was brilliant very efficient and also gave me reminders. I really appreciate her help.
- Listened which was very helpful.
- Excellent Service.
- Always got the help that we needed.
- My adviser was brilliant. He was so helpful and supportive and met me where I was spending a long time with me on the phone filling up all the applications when I wasn't able to.
- Always treat me with respect.
- I was very impressed with my adviser's positivity and deep knowledge of the subject. Our Adviser took time to do the research and helped us with our problems.
- I don't think my adviser could have been any more helpful. Her support was superb.
- My adviser was helpful in my hard time I was going through depression - he saved my life and done a lot for my family. I really wanted he never leave us as I can't do anything, my husband had brain injuries, I had baby, but he helped my family so much I am sad he left us. I hope he can stay with us more.
- I just knew that my adviser would explain things in ways that I understand and guide me in the right direction, can't praise this man enough.
- I could not have got better help.
- I was very satisfied.
- My adviser was very good and helpful, and my needs was met at right time.
- My adviser was very helpful and done everything and gave me all information I needed.

- The advice service and my advisor are very proficient, and the timeliness of my needs are always at the correct time, in fact I think (almost to the point of certainty) that my advisor worked beyond the 9 to 5 to ensure all things, and everything was done in time for me.
- We are very grateful for the help Andy gave to us. Extremely useful, and spot on.
- Very Kind, Very Helpful.
- Yes, very much so.

Standard 3: The Advice Service is always trying to do things better

How happy are you that we meet this standard?

Very Happy 78%, Happy 15%, OK 4%, No answer 2%

Unhappy 1% (1 response)

Comments – Standard 3

- I give it 10 out of 10, no complaints.
- I felt supported in every way.
- My adviser helped make the process very easy and straightforward which is important for someone in a caring role who has so little time.
- I have no complaints at all. Thanks to my adviser, and everyone in the service.
- I didn't know I could give feedback at any time, and I also didn't know I could complain about the service, but I haven't had to do any of these things as the service has been very helpful so far. I am glad to know I can do these things though if I ever need to.
- After my first application got rejected my adviser wrote a letter for me to appeal which they sent to me via email. The letter was great and my adviser said if it was rejected again they would take it all the way to help me as they felt strongly about people being left in my situation.
- My adviser was always keeping the appointments and was very attentive during our talks.
- I don't know how it could be better. Both times I have used the advice expertise and helpfulness has been above and beyond expectations.

- My memory is rather shocking but like I said my adviser would make sure that at some point it would have been discussed.
- A Wonderful Service.
- Yes, I am very happy with the service I received.
- The service provided over the given long period of time has NOT given me any reason or cause to complain - I am very, very happy with the service provided.
- Can't stress enough how we appreciate the help.
- Could not do any better.

Standard 4: The Advice Team is able to meet your needs

How happy are you that we meet this standard?

Very Happy 94%, Happy 2%, No answer 3%

Unhappy 1% (1 response)

Comments - Standard 4

- The service was Excellent, met all my needs.
- I feel positive if I need to ask for help again.
- Always very clear advice given.
- Always seems to know everything that I need and more.
- My adviser was extremely thorough and explained everything that she had done or was going to do.
- I never heard back about what happened with the letter, my adviser had last texted me saying it'd be about 2 weeks then I never heard back. I was going through a very very difficult time coping with everything so I also didn't enquire about what happened but I did feel a bit let down, even if it got rejected I'd of appreciated a text message.**(see follow up provided underneath comments section)*
- As I mentioned my adviser is reliable attentive and very professional adviser.
- Every need met and surpassed.
- My adviser did everything for me.
- I'm very happy about this Advice Team.
- I would always be grateful for all the help I have received since day one.
- There was one small matter that my adviser is/was struggling with, the refund of my car Road Fund Licence, but we shall get round to that in the near future.

Standard 5: The Advice Team treats you with respect

How happy are you that we meet this standard?

Very Happy 87%, Happy 11%, No answer 2%

- My adviser's advice was spot on. Grateful for the help given.

Comments – Standard 5

- I would recommend my adviser, to anyone, Really, Very Happy.
- I was treated with the utmost respect. My adviser also made time to follow up and check on progress.
- Yes, the advisor was very polite and respectful, and I was able to make my own decisions. My privacy and confidentiality were also respected. She was very friendly when I spoke to her.
- Almost felt I didn't deserve to be treated with such respect.
- Was very helpful, and respectful.
- Polite and Respectful.
- Always put service users' needs first.
- All the communications were very respectful, and I was well taken care of by my adviser.
- As I mentioned my adviser is reliable attentive and very professional adviser.
- Always treated with respect and courtesy.
- My adviser was always helpful action group saved our life in our hard time.
- My Adviser was respectful, and made me feel comfortable, a really, lovely person.
- Yes of course I was treated with respect.
- Always respected.
- I was and am treated with the utmost respect and the service is highly professional.
- Very Helpful, very Kind.
- A Gentleman, very calming and patient. My memory not so good, and I forget. Very patient.

Standard 6: The Advice Service communicates well with you

How Happy are you that we met this Standard?

Very Happy 86%, Happy 9%, OK 2%, No answer 5%

Unhappy 1% (1 response)

Comments - Standard 6

- My adviser listened to me, and got the Job done, I got the Pension Credit, that had been firstly refused.
- Can't say we fully utilised the service. Our adviser was very helpful and offered to do even more to help resolve some issues with benefit payments. She had also directed some other services who either contacted us or we followed up with them. Some of them were out of synch with us knowing about them but everyone has tried to support us in supporting our daughter. Thank you!
- My advisor communicated with me very well. She responded in a quick fashion to my queries and gave me all the information I needed.
- I felt understood and would be reminded on things which I forgot in a sympathetic way.
- Listened to which was helpful.
- On the ball, felt listened to.
- Good Listener.
- All information very well explained.
- As previously stated I was not kept up to date, my adviser and I had several conversations where they knew how much I was struggling to cope with the situation I was in so I just felt let down that I never heard back after the appeal letter was sent. My adviser did offer to look into places I could get furniture but that was last I heard from them. I was very depressed and did not have energy to be chasing it up. (After all the advice service contacted me which was great and seemed like it would be helpful, but in the end felt like a waste of time and false hope)*(see follow up provided beneath comments section)
- All correspondence was in order and we both kept notes. My adviser was a great attention to detail and very nice person.
- I have no understanding of benefit system and apparently my sons' case was a little unusual, but my adviser explained everything at each step we had to go through, even attending meeting with me at the early part of transfer to UC. She guided the less experienced manager into ensuring that my son got what he was entitled to.
- My Adviser did everything and made everything seem so simple. I don't know what I would have done without his help.

- My Adviser was very helpful to us as we didn't know how to go about applying for our rebate.
- Yes, they are very good. Yes, that's a Big help for me and my son. You are doing a great job to those who needed your support like me. I have received a very good service, keep it up.
- Great communication.
- My adviser's patience, communication and attention to detail are second to none.
- My adviser has a great depth of knowledge and experience in dealing with the DWP and is and was able to clearly explain the sometimes complexities of the workings or non-workings of the DWP. To be totally frank, I and I assume many others who utilise your service would not be able to deal with and copy with the workings or non-workings of the DWP
- We knew what our adviser could help with. Extremely useful.
- I was upset, and he listened, very helpful and calming.
- Yes, tried very hard to make me understand and understand me.

Standard 7: The Advice Service makes a positive difference to you

How happy are you that we meet this standard?

**Very Happy 77%, Happy 15%, OK 4%, No answer 1%
Unhappy 3% (3 responses)**

Comments – Standard 7

- Has made a great difference to me, my adviser sorted out my Pension Credit, I was a bag nerves, had bills lying, and getting the money sorted has meant I could pay my bills.
- I felt understood and would be reminded on things which I forgot in a sympathetic way
- I was supported to try and look after myself and that I was important in supporting others. My priority to myself was important.
- The grant will help us greatly, especially when I am unable to work as I care for our son.

- My adviser has helped me to improve my financial situation. I was barely making ends meet and now I can go through the month with more peace of mind knowing that I can do my weekly grocery shopping and buy clothes for myself of my son with the peace of mind that I won't be in the red.
- The advice and support made a massive difference to me. I was going through a difficult time and receiving the welfare fund grant money really helped me buy household goods for my flat. The other grant was for a caravan holiday which I'll use this summer to take my son away for a short break. My son has autism, and I am his carer so to be able to receive the fund money to take him on a short break will make such a difference to us in the holidays. Just being away to enjoy some quality stress free time together and get a break from day-to-day life will be fantastic.
- Helped with completing forms to enable me to receive ESA.
- Felt very happy with the info and yes it made a great difference.
- Excellent, don't know what I would have done without her. Made a big difference to me. Thankyou.
- The help is really appreciated.
- Benefits were reinstated.
- There was no positive difference to my life due to this service, if anything it was just another reason for me to feel let down and disappointed in the end. As stated, even for the adviser to have just updated me on the outcome would have been appreciated so much. I did receive decent advice and I do appreciate the work that my adviser done to help me, however it just felt like it was pointless in the end.(* see follow-up beneath)
- My adviser helped us to look at things positively and his support and empathy is much appreciated.
- It made a huge difference in my life solve my tricky problem with UC people. Just keep what you are doing guys, you are great. No thanks a lot I appreciate what you did for me.
- I'm not sure my son would be happily residing in excellent 24/7 care in his own home with sufficient funds to cope if it wasn't for the help, we received from the Action Group.
- Always positive.
- My Adviser sorted out my worries about my rent and told me that I could get his help again if I needed it.

- Due to our Advisers help we got our rebate on our rent which is a Big help to our Finances.
- As someone suffering from mental health issues such as PTSD and high levels of anxiety having this support made and makes my life easier in many aspects.
- I need some help on creating a better cv, but I in the end I made my own cv or improve it form the one I had. I find myself a job as well, eventually.
- My adviser assisted my communications with DWP in a way I would not have been able to myself.
- I'm happy with the service. It was very helpful.
- The workings of the DWP might leave a bit to be desired. Without the help and service of my adviser, I would have been totally lost and not be receiving the benefits I am entitled to. I make you aware that without my adviser the DWP would have, not the correct words but "have done me over". Without my adviser and his great skill and knowledge an appeal hearing did rule against me, but my adviser was able to appeal the incorrect ruling of the appeal hearing with the conclusion that the hearing was illegal, and it was reheard and overturned the original incorrect ruling and ruled in my favour. Honest to goodness and back again!!!
- It looks like that I shall be depending on the DWP and/or the newish Social Security Scotland for things for ever and a day and thus would like to the point of be dependant of your service to help and ensure that I receive the correct benefits. At this juncture in time there is a review of my PIP or now called Adult Disability Payment from 4th January 2024 and I have not received confirmation from Social Security Scotland that I still entitled to Adult Disability Payment although I still do receive the benefit. I think to the point of certainty that the ongoing deterioration of my health will elevate my points to the higher level and thus my just and correct award. In addition to the lack of the written confirmation on my Adult Disability Payment, I am not able to claim the above-mentioned Road Fund Tax, my Blue Badge nor my Bus Pass.
- As stated above, I and I am sure all other service users, would be totally lost and deprived without your priceless support and service. I cannot praise you all enough!
- I think I have above, without question, shown, demonstrated, and explained that I would be totally lost, emotionally, spiritually without the help and support of the service provided and I am sure that all other service users will echo my thoughts, thanks, and praise. I don't have to tell you that if one is not emotionally and spiritually strong then there is the snowball effect with all other things come

tumbling down and bad things become insurmountable. I shall be willing to be contacted in the future to share more about my experience.

- Very Precious. Very grateful.
- He was an Angel, so lucky to have him to help me. I should be saying thank you, exceeded expectations, so glad to walk in my path.
- 100 percent. Could not be happier with the Service I received. I am Speechless, no words to show my thanks.

Overall, how happy are you with the advice service you received?

Very Happy 77%, Happy 10%, OK 12%

No answer 1%

Comments - Overall

- Excellent Service and has really helped me. Would recommend to anyone.
- Fantastic service all round. Very helpful and can advise with a lot of different things. Knowledgeable, helpful, and supportive. I highly recommend the service to others.
- Service from calls to meeting in person was great.
- My adviser is Very Good. All I know that I appreciate all the help. Very Happy.
- My adviser was very, very good. She told me I was not getting all my due benefits and worked really, hard to get me all my benefits.
- Benefits were reinstated.
- I would highly recommend 'A' as a personal adviser; he has natural people skills and ability to listen and look at difficult situation with positive attitude.
- No requirements right now, but I wouldn't hesitate to ever pick up the phone and ask for your help, knowing that I would be talking to absolute experts in their field.
- Wonderful Service. I am so Grateful. Thank you.
- Very Supportive and helpful. Takes a lot of stress off Carers.
- Advisers put it in words that we could understand.
- When you are unwell it is not easy dealing with the DWP. Adviser helped me immensely.
- Thank you to my adviser, and your organisation, and to your administrator, for your patience, in contacting us.

- Could not be happier.

Service Improvements / Quality Plan for 2024-2025

Overall happiness is lower than in previous years with **87% of people reporting they are happy or very happy with our service** (compared to 96% in 22-23) and an increase in the number of 'OK' responses. In the main, analysis of the comments does not help us to understand this slight dip in overall happiness.

Comments from 2 respondents were negative - we followed up with these people to better understand the issues and to try and put things right. See beneath for further information on this.

***Response to specific feedback**

The Development Manager for Advice and Inclusion investigated one evaluation response where the person expressed dissatisfaction with the service they received (comments for standards 4, 6 and 7). The adviser had closed this case in error, without ensuring that all issues were resolved. The Development Manager contacted the person to explain and apologise. The adviser completed the work which resulted in a gain for the person.

The person reported being happy with the follow-up response and appreciated being phoned to resolve.

Advice managers reviewed our processes for supporting advisers to record and organise their work, to reduce chances of a similar mistake happening again.

This example highlights the importance of gathering feedback from people that have used the service in order to improve and correct mistakes.

One respondent's comments related to their employment support worker (rather than their advice worker); the adviser contacted the person to see if they wanted these comments passed on to their employment service.

Service Improvements for 2024-2025

- **To increase awareness of our feedback and complaints processes** (evaluation feedback, standard 3) – all advisers to include this information in the introduction to the service
- **To maximise the numbers of people who provide feedback** - we will have an easy-read evaluation available this year and we will also complete timely evaluations with people who need an interpreter, using the Language Line service.
- **The Advice Service will go through re-accreditation to the Scottish National Standards in 2024-5.** The service will respond to any recommendations highlighted as part of this process.
- **We will expand our evaluation to ask respondents if there was anything they needed help with that we couldn't assist with** - this will help us to identify and respond to gaps in service provision.
- **We will respond to adviser feedback that some people we assisted could not 'make ends meet', even after their income was maximised.** We will work with other advice providers to address this issue and see how our services can respond.