



**Oxfordshire
South & Vale**

In Touch With You

Spring 2020

Welcome to our new quarterly newsletter. Its aim is to keep you up-to-date with the latest news from Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale. This first issue looks at what we are doing to support the local community during the Coronavirus crisis.

Please encourage people to seek our advice when they have a problem they can't resolve.

And do tell us what you like about our service and how we could do better.

We are still here to help

To reduce the spread of Coronavirus, we are no longer offering face-to-face appointments.

You will still be able to talk to our advisers by phone:

Adviceline: 0300 330 9042
Monday to Friday 0900 - 1700

For general advice, please visit our website:

citizensadvice.org.uk



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As our teams are busy, we are encouraging people to first look for advice online at www.citizensadvice.org.uk/coronavirus. If an answer cannot be found, please call Adviceline on 0300 330 9042 or email us at:

abingdon@osavcab.org.uk

didcot@osavcab.org.uk

henley@osavcab.org.uk

thame@osavcab.org.uk

Changes to our service

There has been a substantial increase in demand for advice locally. We had to close our advice centres for face-to-face advice in mid-March but we have equipped over 90 advisers and staff to operate our Adviceline service from home. They have access to the latest information and all the necessary security and confidentiality protocols have been put in place. We are very grateful to them for adapting to these new arrangements so quickly.

The problems people are facing

Across the country, there has been a record-breaking demand for our online service with over 2 million visits to our website last week. Almost a quarter of those page views were on four issues related to Coronavirus:

- [Coronavirus: If your employer has told you not to work](#)
- [If you can't pay your bills because of Coronavirus](#)
- [Check what benefits you can get](#)
- [Coronavirus: what it means for you](#)

Coronavirus Scams

There has been an increase in coronavirus-related scams across Oxfordshire. These range from unknown individuals asking to access homes to offer temperature checks to face masks and sanitisers being paid for but never delivered. The elderly and most vulnerable are at particular risk of being targeted, but everyone needs to be cautious of cold calls, emails and messages that are sent out of blue.

If in doubt, call our Scams Action helpline on 0808 250 5050 or check on our [website](#) for further advice.

Help to claim Universal Credit

Last year we helped 600 people in Oxfordshire South and Vale to apply for Universal Credit through our Help to Claim service. Since March, this has been the single biggest issue clients have phoned about, closely followed by employment concerns. We are pleased to say that we will continue to provide this support through to March 2021.

How we are helping

Our client was unable to work due to the need to self-isolate because of a heart condition. He had never been in debt before but was now very concerned about Council Tax arrears. We provided full debt advice over the phone and by email, including two budget sheets: one for the period of self-isolation and

the other for his normal working situation. We also provided advice on maximising his income and minimising his expenditure. We wrote to the Council on his behalf asking for discretionary write-off of the Council Tax arrears and suggested he applied for Council Tax reduction during the period of self-isolation. The client was very grateful for the help we provided.

This is one of many cases we are supporting at the moment. Self isolation can exacerbate people's anxieties and stress about their financial situation.

Get in touch

If you have any feedback about the newsletter, or would like to suggest a topic for us to cover, please get in touch

at communications@osavcab.org.uk

About Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale

Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale is an independent charity that provides the local Citizens Advice service. Our 150 skilled volunteers work from 4 locations (Abingdon, Didcot, Henley and Thame) and 4 outreaches in two locations (Faringdon and

Wallingford) and are supported by 12 FTE staff. We advise over 11,000 clients each year.