

**citizens
advice**

**Lewes
District**

ANNUAL REPORT



2023/24

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

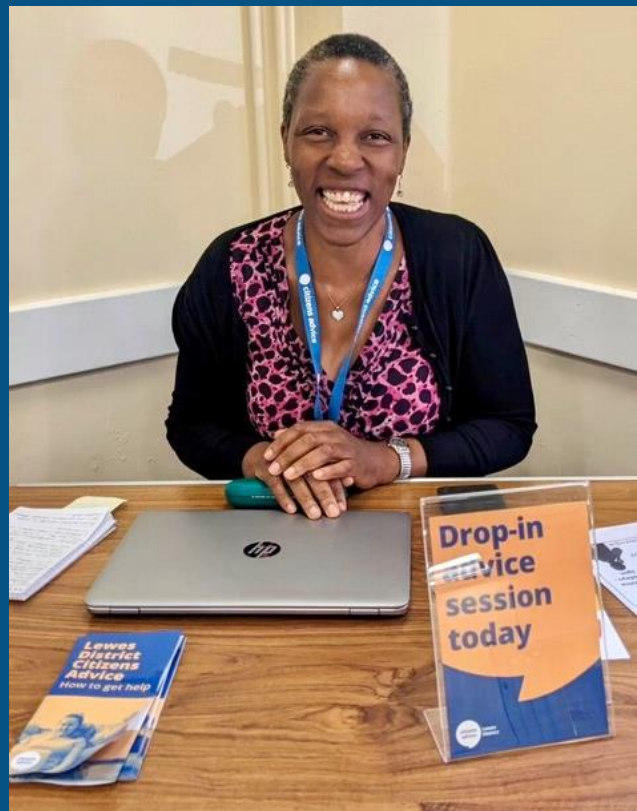
WE ARE LEWES DISTRICT CITIZENS ADVICE

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



Alison Lawfield

This is my first report as Chair of the organisation and I feel that I must say how impressed I have been with everyone involved

Our service is delivered by a small number of key paid professionals and a much larger group of dedicated volunteers who give up their time freely to help and support others. Our volunteers must train to the appropriate level, are then supported and audited to ensure we provide consistent accurate advice. This is by no means an easy role and our huge thanks must go to both our volunteers and paid staff for the work they do

Our Board has responsibility to meet good governance criteria that ensures our organisation and service is of a high quality. Board members are also volunteers and my thanks goes to them too for their expert input and ongoing support. I was extremely pleased to be involved with an important organisational milestone late last year which was the development of our Vision and Values, led by trustee Board members in collaboration with the wider team. These now underpin our strategic objectives and are covered in more detail elsewhere in this report





Our primary purpose as an independent local charity is to respond to and meet the needs of the local community through the service we offer

We have been on a journey of re-adjustment since the pandemic in respect of how much we deliver and where, this being complicated for a period by us being without a permanent home in Lewes itself. I am pleased to report that we now have a home on the first floor at No. 6 High Street and we are able to offer timed appointments with the team there

Elsewhere we are now offering outreach in various locations in the district as well as appointments in our Seaford and Newhaven offices. Our ambition is to widen the service further but like many other similar organisations we are constrained by funding

Our thanks must go to our grant providers, the District and Town Councils, together with the Big Lottery and financial support from many other local organisations, who are recognised on our 'Thanks' page. Despite this great support, not all our costs are met and our five year fundraising strategy launched earlier in 2024 sets out how we plan to fill this gap; the success of the strategy will determine how much more flex there is in the service to widen the demographic of clients we see and client issues being met

Membership of the national Citizens Advice service allows us to blend our ability to respond to local issues as a small local charity but also have an impact nationally. We can feedback anonymised information that can be coordinated nationally to lobby for change and influence policy which is particularly pertinent at this time

In uncertain times and with undoubted challenges to come, we are working hard to improve the sustainability of the organisation so that we can maintain our service delivered by the team of dedicated staff and volunteers



CEO REPORT

During 2023/24 LDCA continued to strive to support vulnerable people across Lewes District and through a Cost Of Living Crisis. People continued to struggle, with a fall in disposable incomes and savings already utilised for some. More households fell into debt and more households struggled to make ends meet, while facing falling into negative budgets. Our community is facing ever growing hardships and the entire team at LDCA continue to work tirelessly to get the best possible solutions for anyone that need us

The staff and volunteer teams provide a wide range of generalist and specialist advice, enabling us to deliver a holistic package of accredited advice that is professional and trusted. Our staff team delivers a broad range of support, delivering specialist case work and outreach and generalist advice- all supported by the wider team including our supervisors, our trainers and operational roles . The backbone of the organisation is of course, our volunteers. Volunteers include critical admin support, level one and level two advisors - all working hard to support people that need our help



Sarah Archer

LDCA is supported by a committed and skilled team of trustees, who help to lead and manage the organisation. We welcomed our new Chair, Alison in this reporting period. Alison brings a vast array of skills and experience to our team and collectively the trustees ensure we are supported in all our roles and that the organisation is governed as effectively and efficiently as possible



In the autumn of 2023 we had a staff and trustee away day, bringing us together to consider our purpose, vision and values and ambitions for the future. These are now embedded within the organisation and are the bedrock from which we work

We continue to work with a broad range of partners and stakeholders and value working collaboratively wherever possible. We work closely with our neighbouring LCAS, district and county councils, in addition to a range of third sector organisations, DWP and health and social care sector teams

In the spring of 2024, we had our year two audit (Leadership Self-Assessment, undertaken by national citizens advice) that reviews the quality of advice, our operations and if we are governed appropriately. In my second year as CEO, I was thrilled to receive the feedback that LDCA were 'exceptional'. A result that must be attributed to the entire team

A huge team effort and one to be celebrated

FUNDING

In 2024 we faced a £70,000 deficit with increasing costs and stagnant levels of income for SLA and grants that haven't been able to reflect unavoidable growing expenditure. We have continued to be well supported by our district and town councils and are incredibly grateful to all for this. Our grant from LDC ensures we can maintain core services and we extend our thanks for this vital contribution. However, these grants alone don't cover our running costs and it's a perfect storm of increased need and a shortfall in funds

We were successful in generating extra resources and in this reporting we secured a range of additional income which included:

- Sussex Community Foundation £7100 for costs towards salaries of our training team
- Lewes Town Council £2000 for replacement IT equipment
- Lewes District Council £20,000 for our Universal Credit Specialist advisor
- ESCC Additional Measures £33,578 for our Generalist Caseworker
- Additional support from Christ Church, Lewes Rotary Club, Seaford Rotary Club and from individual donations

At the end of this reporting period we launched our new 5 year Fundraising Strategy

This provides a clear plan and objectives to help us reach our fundraising requirements. We must diversify our income, securing a matrix of income sources that will enable us to maintain current services, develop services in response to current and future needs and have the sustainability and flexibility to be here for local people now, and in the future. We must also seek to secure funds with full cost recovery wherever possible and need to secure increased levels of core, unrestricted funds

At the end of this reporting period we received the fantastic news of a successful bid to the Big Lottery for £214,454 over three years. This is to deliver outreach advice across more rural locations in the district, meeting hidden and unmet need. This award also funds our new Volunteer Coordinator role, boosting our ability to recruit, train, support and retain our essential volunteer team

Our ROI on every £1 invested

- £2.69 in fiscal value
- £19.70 in public value
- £10.13 to the people we help

Learn how you can donate

[CLICK HERE](#)

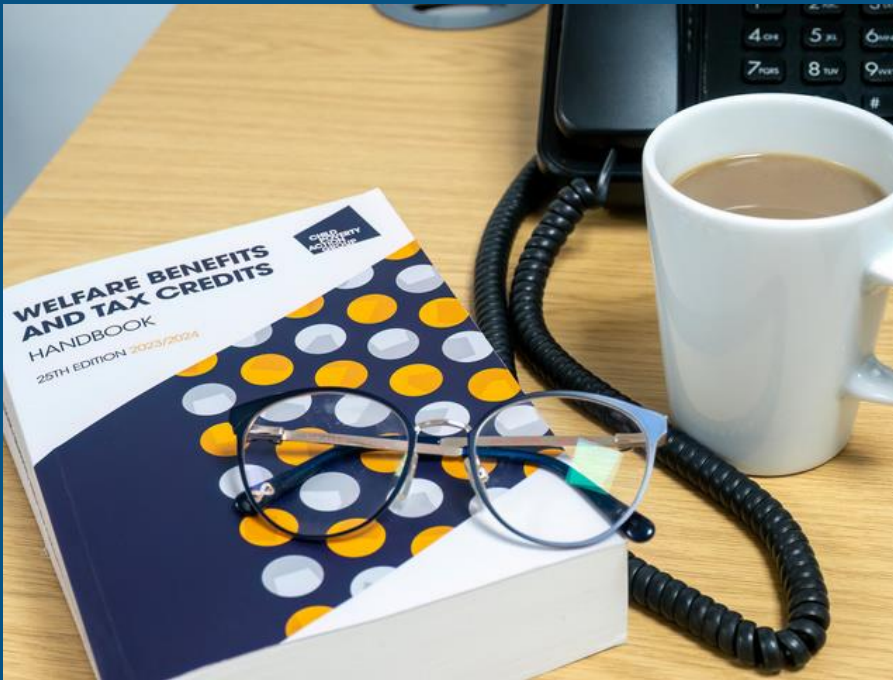
RESEARCH & CAMPAIGNS

We have been extremely lucky to have a dedicated Research and Campaigns volunteer team supporting our work. I'd like to extend our gratitude for the fantastic contribution they have made. Together, we developed a work and development plan for 2024, helping direct and track what we focus on

Key areas have included:



- campaigning for improved dentist provision for Lewes District with parliamentary questions on the subject being submitted
- producing three short promotional films on our work- our film about a client called Brian (supported by our case worker Jason) can be found here [CLICK HERE](#)
- meeting with both our MP's and hosted a Q&A with Lloyd Russell-Moyle
- making a formal response to the Work Capability Assessment Consultation
- tracking LHA rates with local availability and communicated this to key stakeholders
- writing to MPs about the National Red Index (people living in negative budgets) and about the national 53 -week campaign (extra Monday in 24/25)



SPOTLIGHT ON NEGATIVE BUDGETS

In 2023, 4935 people in the Lewes District constituency were in a negative budget (5.19% of the constituency)

A negative budget is where people's income doesn't cover essential spending. This isn't a problem that support with budgeting can overcome. No matter what people do, they can't afford their bills for basics like housing, energy and food and our advisors have no way of finding a way out for people. People's incomes must increase and essential living costs must decrease

In addition to households in a negative budget, many more are 'living on empty' only avoiding falling into a negative budget by cutting their essential spending to unsafe levels. Households are going hungry, living in cold houses, cannot afford daily household essentials and as a result are suffering increased levels of poor physical and mental health and have decreased levels of wellbeing and life opportunities

We campaigned our MP's about negative budgets and the numbers of people living this way locally, asking them to take a stand and raise this huge issue within parliament and to those who have the power to enact change

SPOTLIGHT ON 53 WEEKS

In 2024/5 there are 53 Mondays

It is a quirk of our calendar system that every 5-6 years there is a year with 53 Mondays. For social housing residents who pay their rent weekly, that means they have to pay an extra week's rent that has accumulated - and it will not be covered by Universal Credit.

Universal Credit is calculated monthly on the basis of a 52-week year (364 charging days) and in a year with 53 Mondays, this means that someone on UC will be given 52 weeks of rent but must meet the cost of 53

We wrote to our MP's and LDC about the 53 week issue and tried to understand the numbers of people in LD that would be impacted by this



LOOKING TO THE YEAR AHEAD

The rural outreach service has launched, providing a drop service at multiple locations across the district and our new volunteer coordinator is in post, already having a positive impact within the organisation



Fundraising is going to be focal point for the organisation and we have launched a number of fundraising tools and platforms in 2024, supporting and encouraging people to undertake their own fundraising events and challenges on our behalf. This has already had support from our network and we hope that this will continue to grow. We have and will continue to identify and apply for suitable grants, helping us to meet the growing shortfall in income and expenditure

A key challenge remains in the common misunderstanding that LDCA is a local, independent charity and not a government or local authority body. We must continue to get the messaging out more widely and build understanding with regard to our status and in turn, our fragility in having long term, secured funding to cover basic running costs and deliver an essential service. Aligned with this, is promoting the understanding that investing in our preventative services produces much greater cost saving to other core services and organisations such as health services, the DWP and district and county councils

We have our year three Leadership Self-Assessment audit in the spring of 2025



We must raise additional funds to maintain a number of service areas in 24/25 and would also like to raise extra funds to re-establish outreach in town locations

By October 2025 we will need to replace over 70% of our IT suite due to a system upgrade requirement, work has already been underway to achieve this essential area of work and but we must continue to secure funds to ensure we reach this target

We have continued to develop our digital platforms and reach, supported by volunteers. We have recently launched a new TikTok platform, creating unique content that we hope will help us to engage a young demographic

We are planning to launch an autism specialist service in late 2024, in partnership with Brighton CA. In the spring of 2024, Sussex University students and one of our own R&C volunteers, completed a research project and report which examined why we don't reach younger people under 25. We will take this learning and use it to help us bid for funding for youth advice work

There is much to do, but we're ambitious and committed to succeeding and we would be thankful of any support that can be provided in helping us on our journey

LDCA IN NUMBERS



12% of our clients were seen in person



54% of clients were helped over the phone



24% were supported over email



10% were helped in other ways, such as a video call, or letter

- Last year we helped 1,869 clients with 6,423 issues
- We enabled over £505,000 in financial gains
- Personal Independence Payments were the most common benefit requiring support
- Fuel debt was the largest debt issue
- 62% 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)

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

CLIENT CASE STUDY

Our client is a pension age woman living alone. She approached LDCA for help with her rent and council tax payments. She was struggling to manage repayment of a housing benefit overpayment, rent arrears and council tax arrears. In addition, she was facing an upcoming increase in her rent. The situation was causing her anxiety

She is in receipt of a state pension and 2 small occupational pensions inherited from her deceased husband. She has a very small amount of savings. After speaking to her and discovering that she had various health conditions the adviser identified that she might be eligible for Attendance Allowance. The adviser assisted with the application process including the form. The higher rate of Attendance Allowance was awarded. This in turn meant that the client became entitled to Pension Credit for the first time. The award of Pension Credit means that the client's winter fuel allowances payments are also protected and she will continue to receive them

Our client has been able to repay her rent and council tax arrears. Her housing benefit and council tax reduction now cover her eligible rent and council tax in full. The award of Pension Credit means that she is now eligible for more help with her health care costs and, in particular, vouchers for glasses which she was especially delighted with

The client says of the advice and support she received:

“This has really improved my quality of life”



SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW

Demand, both in terms of volume and complexity, has increased in recent years in response to the Covid pandemic, its aftermath, the energy and Cost of Living crises

We have had to develop our service delivery model to ensure we are as accessible as possible to those that rely on our service

In 2023, following consultation with our staff and volunteer teams we overhauled our service delivery model and launched our own standalone local Adviceline service. This has seen capacity increase from an all-time low in 2022 of 4% when we were part of a country-wide phone line network to a sustainable level of 70% of demand met



Sophie Hoffman

Complementing this we have continued to develop our digital presence with our interactive website providing self-help information resources and webform self-referral route for tailored support

While these routes have made our services available to many people and a wider demographic, as champions of digital inclusion, we strive to also be present for face-to-face support in the community at accessible locations such as foodbanks, community centers and village halls

In 22/23 a small grant from LDC supported our outreach in 'warm spaces' throughout the district. Our volunteer advisor, Sue, moved into paid employment with us to deliver this outreach support across community hubs throughout Lewes District

Sue helped a client at Peacehaven Community Supermarket together with the community navigator. The client suffered from anxiety which made engaging with services particularly difficult. She was recently bereaved and had an unclaimed entitlement to Universal Credit, she had not felt up to going through the application process. Working in partnership, Sue and the community navigator supported the client through the process and saw the impact of their help in the clients' subsequent visits. It has been clear to see the value that Citizens Advice provides working in Community Outreach settings, in partnership with other organisations



This LDC outreach funding ended in 2023, but alternative funding was secured from the Big Lottery in 2024 to enable us to deliver outreach in rural communities

Clients are seen in a setting where they feel confident and comfortable talking about what their needs might be and are provided with free impartial, independent advice to empower them to make informed choices about whatever issue they might be facing

We value partnership working with the local authority and other VCSE groups

Partnership working helps in sharing information and opens referral pathways, participation in district wide multi-agency working groups and gives a platform to our clients' experiences. Our teams have been involved in county-wide specialist training initiatives on welfare rights issues

We are fortunate to have incredible staff and volunteer teams. With a number of longstanding team members, we have amassed over 180 years of Citizens Advice experience between us. With restricted budgets we have focused on our in-house training resource and developed mentoring opportunities to upskill our advice teams, supporting closer working relationships across staff and volunteer teams, and we have been able to support a record number of volunteers into paid staff roles when funding opportunities have permitted

At LDCA, we firmly believe that Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are not just values to uphold but principles to integrate into every element of our organisation

We have made great improvements in diversity across all teams, driven both by developing new, more inclusive and flexible volunteer opportunities and overhauling the application process to make it more collaborative, to better match volunteers with roles

VOLUNTEER VOICES

I started volunteering with LDCA in September, 2004, the week after I took early retirement from my job. I knew that I would need something to keep me occupied and, hopefully, challenged. It's now been nearly 20 years since I started training and I'm still learning something new every week. It's great to be working within an organisation which helps so many people every day

Wendy

I volunteer for the Citizens' Advice Bureau because it helps me to understand how our society functions and to empower people. I am especially interested in advising people on their options in difficult situations so that they can try to improve their lives. Being an adviser helps me to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to do so and to pursue my broader interests in this area. It is also stimulating and fun!

Ed



VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

In 2023, researchers conducted network-wide surveys and consultations to explore the value of volunteering and 'volunteering models' in Citizens Advice.

The full report makes for interesting reading and can be accessed here [CLICK HERE](#)

A value of volunteering calculator was developed which quantifies the contribution our volunteers make in terms of time donated, health and wellbeing outcomes, employability and skill development

At Lewes District Citizens Advice, the value of our incredible team of volunteers in 2023/24 exceeded £280,000

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Challenging, rewarding, empowering, fulfilling and fun are just a few words to describe my experience at Citizens Advice Lewes

I started the comprehensive training programme last September with a great group of like-minded people, all committed to help people in our local community. Our Trainer was excellent, patient and despite there being a great deal of information to absorb, it never felt too overwhelming

It was a real eye opener to realise the variety of subjects that Citizens Advice offer their free impartial service on, a wonderful opportunity for me to broaden my horizons and learn new things

The transition from training to being an adviser on the ground (a slightly scary thought, for all our group) was in fact seamless

We started by answering e mails, then answering the phone lines and in the future, I hope to see clients face to face. On a day-to-day basis we have access to excellent resources, continuous support from the training team and everything is thoroughly checked

This is an ongoing and very welcome aspect to volunteering here. The all-knowing Supervisor is always at hand to help with any queries and then of course there are the other paid staff and volunteers

What an amazing group of people! It is a privilege to work alongside them, and I just love it!



Sharmila Bayliss, Volunteer Advisor

QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE

Good 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 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 9 areas which are governance, strategy and planning; risk management and compliance, people management, partnership working, research and campaigns and equality, diversity and inclusion. 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

Lewes District Citizens Advice is 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 dealing with us they are in extremely safe hands

Our current trustees are listed, each of them having a particular area of responsibility:

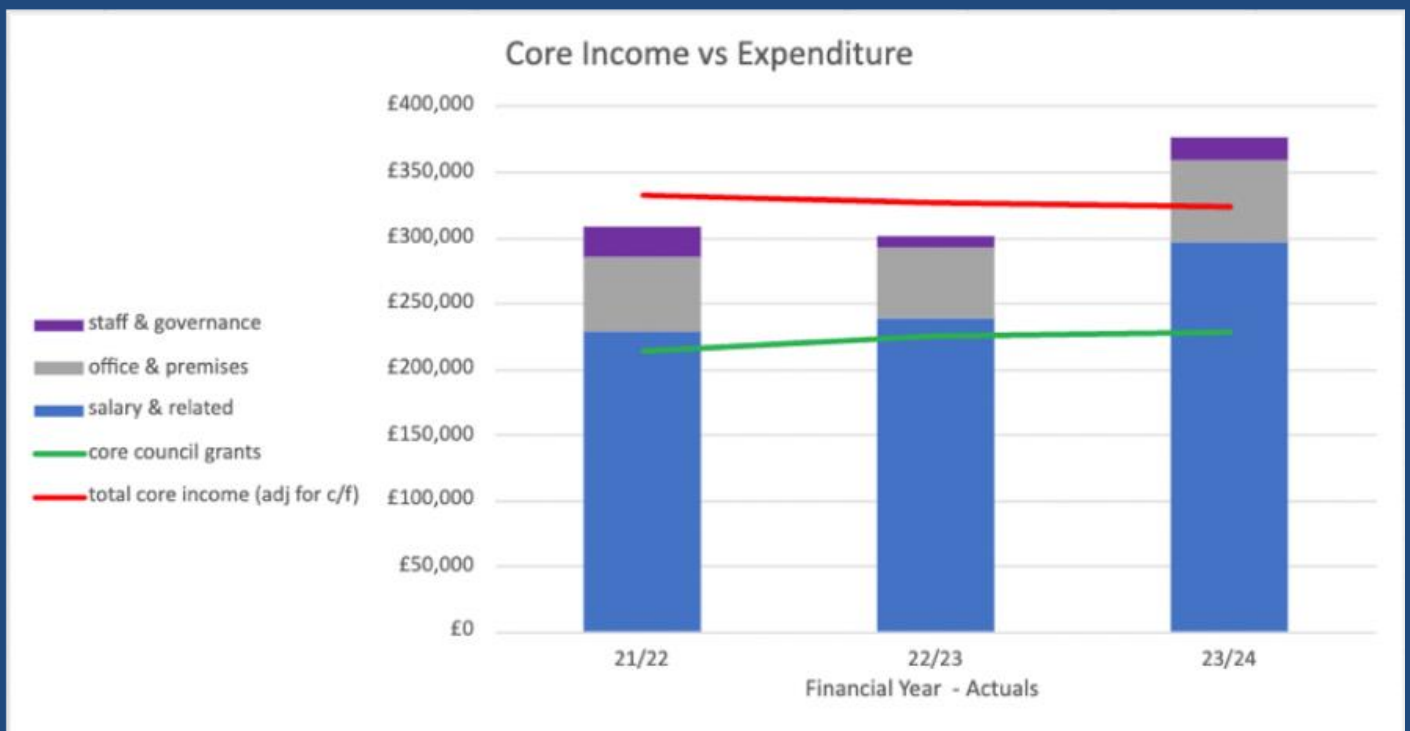
- Alison Lawfield – Chair
- Julia Hammond – Treasurer
- Emma Kolkman – Research and Campaigns
- Nicola Morgan – HR
- Gavin Haines – IT
- Kevin Powell – Accountant
- Stephen Hallam - Legal



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

	Advising Clients	ESCC Additional Measures	Funds for Distribution to Clients	Total	Advising Clients	ESCC Additional Measures	Funds for Distribution to Clients	Total
	2024				2023			
Income:								
Lewes District Council main grant	190,000			190,000	190,000			190,000
Town Council grants	38,580			38,580	35,543			35,543
Other grants	33,192			33,192	76,497	37,000		113,497
Donations	6,314			6,314	343			343
Bank interest	4,528			4,528	1,229			1,229
Funds for distribution to Clients	7,000		30,000	37,000	4,000		45,020	49,020
Total Income	279,614	0	30,000	309,614	307,612	37,000	45,020	389,632
Expenditure:								
Employment costs	266,843	29,130	781	296,754	208,890	29,286		238,176
Other staff costs	12,417	1,355		13,772	6,246	876		7,122
Citizens Advice info services & publications	7,068	772		7,840	6,764	948		7,712
Office costs	21,128	2,306		23,434	18,023	2,527		20,550
Premises costs	27,093	2,958		30,051	21,999	3,084		25,083
Audit, legal & prof, bank charges	2,475	270		2,745	1,744	245		1,989
Governance	1,913	209		2,122	246	35		281
Funds distributed to Clients			44,426	44,426			42,009	42,009
Total Expenditure	338,937	37,000	45,207	421,144	263,913	37,000	42,009	342,922
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	-59,323	-37,000	-15,207	-111,530	43,699	0	3,010	46,709
Fund balances b/f at 1 April	297,940	37,000	15,207	313,147	254,240	37,000	12,197	266,437
Fund balances c/f at 31 March	201,617	0	0	201,617	297,940	37,000	15,207	313,147

INCOME V EXPENDITURE TRENDS



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
Knill James 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
Christ Church
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



**citizens
advice**

**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, Telscombe Cliffs, Ringmer, Chailey, Bishopstone and Newick

www.lewesdistrictca.org.uk

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Follow Us on

