

West View Advice  
& Resource Centre Ltd



Serving the Community

# West View Advice & Resource Centre Ltd

Annual Report 2019 to 2020



**Serving the community of Hartlepool  
Delivering advice for over 30 years**

Company Registration No. 2994776 Charity No. 1084632

West View Advice & Resource Centre Limited. A Company Limited by Guarantee, whose registered address is The Community Centre, Miers Avenue, Hartlepool, TS24 9JQ. Incorporated in England and Wales.

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# WEST VIEW ADVICE AND RESOURCE CENTRE

## BACKGROUND

West View Advice & Resource Centre Limited (WVARC) was established in 1983 and is a member of the Advice Service Alliance.

Embedded within the local community and operating from its offices in the West View area of Hartlepool, WVARC is a not-for-profit organisation that has been providing advice and support within the Hartlepool area for more than 30 years and, since August 2016, throughout the North East.

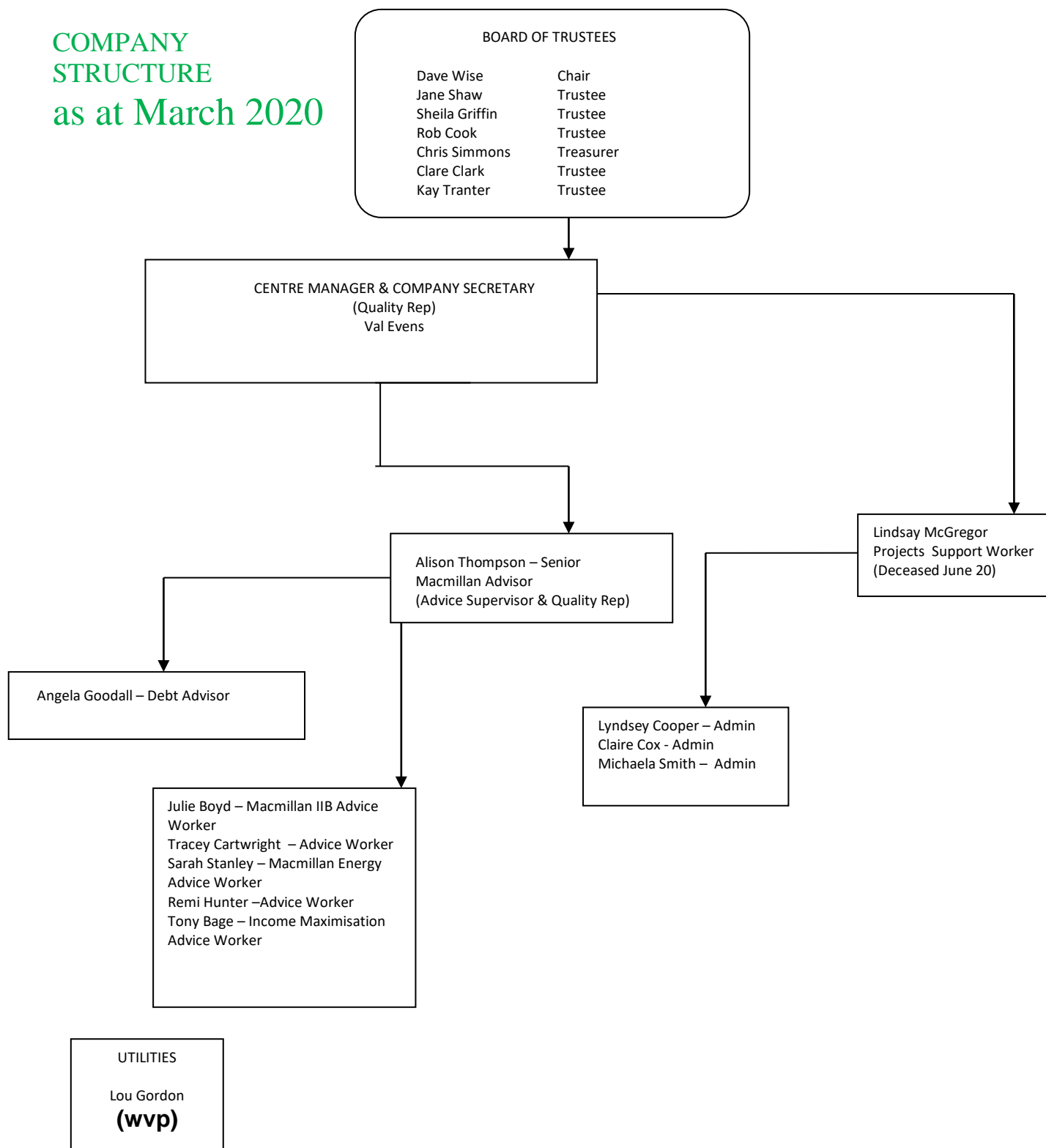
The main business of WVARC is currently to offer welfare benefits advice and support to disadvantaged people within Hartlepool on issues such as debt, housing benefit, energy efficiency, disability benefits and welfare rights. Services are offered via centre based appointments, outreach work and limited home visits for housebound clients.

Due to the government's austerity measures, West View Community Centre was under threat of closure and in 2012, in partnership with West View Project, WVARC moved its services to West View Community Centre. This was to operate and manage an accessible community centre within the Brus ward, (now known as De Bruce due to changes in the ward boundaries) securing existing community services and developing new activities for the benefit of the residents.

The Centre aims to continue to provide for the residents of Hartlepool a resource centre service which is sustainable in the long-term, focusing on the needs of the area. The Centre remains committed to providing a free, confidential and impartial service and aims to be as inclusive as is possible within the local community.

The principal funders for the organisation are Hartlepool Borough Council, Macmillan Cancer Support, Trusthouse Foundation, Virgin Money Foundation, Northern TUC Asbestos Support and Campaign Group, Hadrian Trust, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Kilburn Road Children and Young People Family Resource Centre.

**COMPANY  
STRUCTURE  
as at March 2020**



## Overview

This year we are producing a shortened version of our Annual Report, due to the impact of Coronavirus and although lockdown came towards the end of our financial year. The lockdown had a massive impact on how we would deliver our advice service to our clients.

I must thank the staff for adapting to delivering advice via the telephone, from their own homes and thanks to the skeleton staff that remained on site to ensure that the organisation could still deliver our services to our clients.

In June we held our Annual Midsummer Murder Mystery and raised a massive £1827 which was split equally between ourselves and Macmillan. In November we held a Ceilidh which raised a further £1397 for the advice service.

Throughout the year we hosted a number of Community Hub services which included a library open to the public 3 days per week, an exercise class and a walking group. Our advice services are available throughout Hartlepool five days per week, offering advice in our own Centre and from Community Hubs South & Central as well as Kilmarnock Road Children & Young People Family Resource Centre. In the forthcoming year, once we are able to go back out into the community, we will also be delivering advice from the 4<sup>th</sup> Community Hub – The Coastal Hub.

In January we were awarded the Hartlepool Borough Contract to deliver advice services in Hartlepool from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. In addition to the standard contract we will also be delivering a pilot service through the Welfare Support team, to assist people to maximise their income and take control of their finances.

We have worked closely with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to assist in delivering the aims of the Hartlepool Action Lab, specifically with the £1million pound challenge. This year saw us getting involved in some targeted support in the Oxford Road area, with attendance at 'Oxfest' and follow up work with the JRF engagement team.

This year we have supported our clients in making applications for benefits claims in excess of 10 million pounds.

Valerie A Evens  
Macmillan Centre Manager  
April 2020

## WHAT SERVICES DO WE OFFER?

We provide free, confidential and impartial advice to help the people of Hartlepool resolve their problems. We are equipped to deal with issues spanning from debt to housing to welfare benefits.

### Areas of Advice covered

Welfare Benefits	Disability Benefits
Housing Benefits	Debt
Form Filling	Family/Personal
Calculations	Employment
Home visits for Macmillan	Energy Efficiency & Tariff Switching

We helped over 3000 households with over 4300 residents and have conducted 3500 face to face interviews with a further 188 telephone interviews being undertaken from 23<sup>rd</sup> March to 31<sup>st</sup> March, during lockdown..

**Hours and Times of Availability – Check our Facebook page or website for the latest information**

## The Community Centre

There have been many activities in the Community Centre throughout the last 12 months in addition to our regular groups which include: The Liners, Craft Group, Art Group, The 3 R's, Slimming World and the Cancer Support Group we have hosted

- Community Bistro – Each Friday from September 19 to December 19
- Exercise Class – Each Tuesday evening.
- 2 New Chair Exercise Classes

The footfall for the Community Centre was over 18000.

## A snapshot of the activities of our Cancer Support Group

The Cancer Support Group continues to grow and is well attended. This year the group re-introduced themselves to the community and held an open day with press coverage in the local newspaper. This was very successful with the group gaining a number of new members who have become regular attendees. Due to the increased demand for the group the session has now been extended from one hour to two hours each Tuesday, 10.00 am – 12 noon.

We have a good mix of both male and female attending, mixed age range and with a range cancer diagnoses and sessions are always filled with positivity, fun and laughter. We play various games and quizzes. This year the group have enjoyed Archery, Indoor bowls, Bingo, Darts & Table Tennis.

The group offers members the opportunity to chat to others in a similar position and those who come along often feedback to say how much benefit they get from attending.

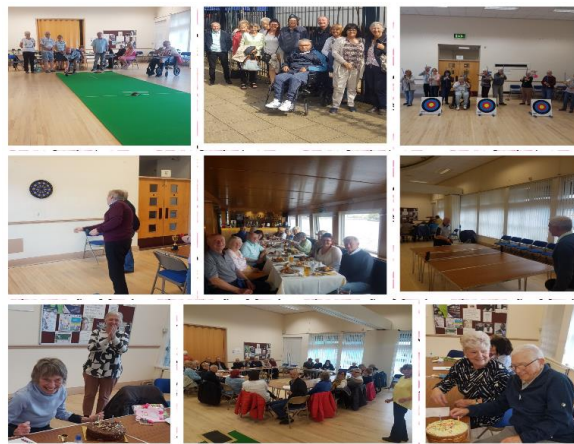
We enjoyed a fabulous day sailing along the river Tees on “The Teesside Princess”, we had a lovely visit to the seaside & enjoyed afternoon tea at Surfside Seaton Carew. All enjoyed a three Course Christmas meal at the Marine Hotel.

As the group are aware of the benefits of exercise to aid recovery many of the members now meet up in the Centre each Monday to attend the Movers and Groover's, Chair Based Exercise class. Other activities have included holistic therapies and a Sound Therapy session

Below are just a couple of comments we received.

- 'The treatment was great, It took me on a journey of sound and I found myself switch my over thinking mind off, very relaxing'
- "I was sceptical before having the treatment but it made me feel very relaxed and I would definitely try again".

The group are strengthening friendships with each other both inside and outside of the group, keeping in touch with each other using social media.



## MACMILLAN ADVICE SERVICE REPORTS

### Hartlepool & North Tees – Alison Thompson, SENIOR MACMILLAN ADVISOR - APRIL 2020

The Macmillan Advice Service continues to be very well used, whether it be home visits, in centre, or in a health setting. However, due to CCG funding coming to an end and not being able to find any replacement funding, we were unable to continue to offer appointments in the GP surgery's.

The service continues to be in great demand.

- 227 In-Centre Appointments at West View
- 330 Home visits
- 62 Clients seen in Hospital or Outreach Location
- 49 Telephone/Email Advice since lockdown

Once again, I will use the Annual Report as an opportunity to blow our own trumpet. We continue to receive excellent customer service feedback and evidentially we have clients returning time and again to our services.

What some of our clients said about our service:

- *'Alison is such an easy person to discuss problems and worries with. A great listener and a great support. Thank you'*
- *The advice & support we were given was unreal, what a lovely lady, so friendly and happy made us feel it could laugh again not done in a long time. Alison Thompson x. Thank you.*
- *Excellent - feel weight lifted*
- *Tracey was very helpful with some good news - excellent service.*

100% of our clients who returned questionnaires, rated the service as Excellent or Very Good and 50% reported that their income would increase due to the assistance our service had provided.

The ethos of our company is that we are here for the benefit of the client not that the client is here for the benefit of us. We always do our best for the client, and I was always taught to not just look at the initial issue the client would present themselves with, you need to look at everything, often advising clients what will happen in 2-3 months' time, so they are aware, and advising they can come back to see us when things alter. Circumstances change, clients whose lives are affected by cancer don't follow a set pattern.

- ❖ Total confirmed as gained in benefit income (regular ongoing payments) £931,848.00
- ❖ Total gained through one off payments (grants, compensation and arrears, etc) £397,992.00
- ❖ Total projected gains (applied for but not yet confirmed as awarded) £2,603,764.00

I really do enjoy my job and love to help people, I'm sure I say this every year but it really is true, I'm very lucky to meet some lovely people who just need some help, advice and guidance, and lucky to work with a great group of colleagues.

Cancer can happen to any one of us, and to be able to assist and guide someone through the benefits process, which just alleviates some of their pressure, is a very worthwhile job to do.



## Macmillan Home Energy Service Report – Sarah Stanley, MACMILLAN ENERGY ADVISOR APRIL 2020

I am pleased to say that I am starting year 5 of the Macmillan Energy Home Service (Healthy Home Checks) which is going from strength to strength with the referrals still coming from a variety of sources, which include internal referrals from our Macmillan Benefit Advisors, Macmillan information Centres, Nurses, Volunteers and Word of mouth.

The physical implications of cancer are widely recognised. However, people living with cancer and those around them, face another, less obvious burden - the financial impact of their diagnosis. This means, many are faced with the double hit of reduced income and increased costs. People living with cancer often find that they are spending more money to keep warm. This could be because they are spending more time at home and feel the cold due to their treatment.

I have taken part in a variety of events across the Teesside area to promote the services that are available to those diagnosed with cancer. These events include Living with and Beyond Cancer, Stay Warm Health Watch, Cancer Support Groups and Volunteers at Macmillan Information Centres

Throughout the year, my main focus continues to be to assist those affected by cancer with a healthy home check ensuring that they are maintaining the heat needed to aid their recovery during their treatment. All the information provided is completely free, confidential, independent and impartial.

➤ Healthy Home Checks	369
➤ Tariff Switch	190
➤ Warm Home Discounts	179
➤ Charis and Macmillan Grants	52
➤ New Boiler Installed	19

Achieving savings of **£104,232.43**

## TUC / Macmillan Asbestos Support and Campaign Group - Julie Boyd, Macmillan Industrial Injuries Advice Worker – April 2020

West View Advice & Resource Centre has been working in partnership on this project with Macmillan and the Northern TUC Asbestos Support and Campaign Group (ASCG) since 2015, the group itself was set up in 2012 to give help and support to those people diagnosed with Asbestos related conditions.

The service provides benefits advice and support to those affected by Asbestos related conditions, aiming to alleviate financial difficulties for the patient at one the most difficult times of their life. As the Industrial Injuries Benefits Adviser, I cover a large geographical area from the borders of Scotland to Teesside and Northern Cumbria. This year I am pleased to report that **£2,572,025.00** has been confirmed as secured in extra benefits and compensation payments for our clients.

We support those people affected by asbestos related conditions if eligible to claim Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit and the lump sum Workers Compensation Payment for the following conditions:

D1 – Asbestosis  
D3 – Mesothelioma  
D8 & D8A – Asbestos related Lung Cancer  
D9 – Pleural Thickening

Many of the people affected by these conditions worked with Asbestos fifty or more years ago, often remaining dormant and only showing signs of affecting people many years later. It often comes as a complete shock to those diagnosed with such dreadful conditions. The symptoms are often difficult to cope with and have a detrimental effect on the lives of those affected, some of which are life limiting. I often receive referrals from Lung Nurses, just as the client has been diagnosed with the condition, they are normally struggling to come to terms with their diagnosis, especially when they have been told their condition is terminal.

There are many people diagnosed with an Asbestos related condition who have never worked with Asbestos, however, their partner has worked with it and there are also those who have no idea how they have been exposed to Asbestos. Many of our clients affected by the conditions listed above were exposed through traditional industries such as shipbuilding, chemical industries etc. but many are affected from industries that you would not automatically associate with Asbestos, for example working in schools.

The ASCG is a member of the National Asbestos Forum, this is network which enables us to keep abreast of national issues offering the opportunity to not only promote our service but to meet and exchange news, views and issues other Industrial Injuries specialist advisers.

Throughout the years I have developed a good working relationship with Specialist Lung Nurses, who refer clients to the service.

I continue to count it a privilege to be part of this service.

## **DEBT ADVICE SERVICE REPORT**

We were able to offer face to face appointments with our Specialist Debt Advisor on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays in Community Hub North and Community Hub Central. We also carried out Home Visits to housebound clients.

Our advice is confidential, impartial, completely free to clients and carried out to the highest standards as evidenced by our Advice Quality Mark.

Every client receives detailed advice tailored to their specific situation. Our client base is diverse and although they are all experiencing financial difficulties, they can affect individuals differently. Being in debt and unable to meet your commitments can have an impact on your mental, your physical health and your relationships and clients are often depressed and anxious and find it difficult to reach out for help.

Clients can have other issues and when they contact the Centre it could be for other reasons however our advisers and reception staff are alert to this and excellent at reassuring and referring clients to the Debt Advice Service. We also receive referrals from our partner organisations.

Appointments can last up to 90 minutes and cover income maximisation and budgeting advice. The Debt Advisor will complete an income and expenditure with the client and identify the creditors to prepare a full financial statement. Each individual creditor is explained, some debts are priority and need immediate attention and others are non-priority. The financial statement is used as a tool to identify the options available to the client and as a budgeting aid and a negotiating tool. A strategy is agreed with the client to obtain the best possible outcome. Following the appointment, a detailed letter is sent to the client confirming the advice given and the action that needs to be taken and who is taking the action.

Some clients will only require advice and be able to carry out the action needed themselves but the majority of our clients require full casework where the Debt Advisor will negotiate with the creditors on their behalf by telephone, letter and email which was introduced this year, to reach affordable payment arrangements and prevent further action from being taken. This can be time consuming and a case can take several months to conclude.

We can advise and assist with court action at each stage from a claim being issued to enforcement action. We dealt with bailiff warrants issued by the county court and high court writs and court orders for possession and eviction.

We can advise on insolvency procedures and as the Debt Advisor is an Authorised Intermediary, we are able to prepare and submit Debt Relief Order applications. A Debt Relief Order results in the debts being unenforceable and effectively written off and gives the client a totally fresh start debt free.

During the financial year covered by this report

- Debt Advice Appointments 207
- Telephone/Email Advice 126
- Routine Letter/Fax/Email 959
- Routine Telephone Calls 478
- Debts totalled £1,035,028.40

- Debt Relief Orders Made 11
- Debts written off £153,577.42

*Angie Goodall*  
*Debt Advisor*  
*April 2020*

## **COMMUNITY HUB & GENERAL ADVICE SERVICES**

Our generalist benefit advice workers cover a wide range of queries ranging from Benefits, Housing, Consumer, Tax and Employment. We endeavour to offer the best possible service, and work as part of a team to ensure the best results and solutions for our clients at all times.

Initially we start by carrying out a full benefit check and a 'better off' calculation with clients to establish if they are any entitled to any benefits or answer any queries that arise. When it is identified that a benefit needs to be claimed we will then assist the client to make a claim either by completing the application on the telephone, online or a paper form, dependent upon which benefit it is.

As some of our clients are housebound and unable to attend an appointment, we do offer a home visit ensuring our service is accessible to everyone. In addition to home visits, our services can be accessed in a variety of venues throughout the town, which include the Community Hubs and voluntary sector premises.

In the last year we have seen a high increase in the level of new claims for Personal Independence Payment. As well as an increase in Mandatory Reconsiderations and appeals due to disallowed claims for Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance, ESA and UC following Work Capability Assessments. Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment and Pension Credit continue to be the primary benefits currently being claimed. We have continued to keep up to date with any new changes to benefits including rates policy change.

As a generalist Advice worker, we see a wide range of queries which range from a straightforward benefit claim to a complicated appeal situation.

In the year April 19 to March 20 we have completed **3405** benefits and other applications, assisting our clients in applying for over **10 million pounds**.

There has been an increase in PIP claims being disallowed, resulting in us compiling over 120 Mandatory Reconsideration and Appeal requests for clients.

## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

West View Advice & Resource Centre is a charity and relies on funding to make a difference to the lives of individuals, families and communities.

We thank the following for their support during 2019/2020

Hartlepool Borough Council, Macmillan Cancer Support, Trusthouse Foundation, Virgin Foundation, Hadrian Trust, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Kilmarnock Road Children & Young People Family Resource Centre, Hospital of God at Greatham and Northern TUC Asbestos Campaign and Support Group.

## ORGANISATIONAL DETAILS.

FULL POSTAL ADDRESS West View Advice & Resource Centre Limited  
The Community Centre, Miers Avenue  
Hartlepool, TS24 9JQ

COMPANY NUMBER. 2994776

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER. 1084632

TELEPHONE NUMBER. 01429 271275

APPOINTMENTS LINE 01429 271294

FAX NUMBER. 01429 423007

E-MAIL Reception@wvarc30.org.uk

WEBSITE ADDRESS <http://www.wvarc30.org.uk>

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

Mr D Wise	Chairperson
Mr C Simmons	Treasurer
Mrs J Shaw	Trustee
Mrs S Griffin	Trustee
Mr R Cook	Trustee
Mrs C Clark	Trustee
Mrs K Tranter	Trustee

CENTRE MANAGER & SECRETARY Mrs Valerie A Evens

### STAFF MEMBERS DURING 2019/2020

Alison Thompson	Senior Macmillan Advice Worker
Julie Boyd	Macmillan Industrial Injuries Benefits Advice Worker
Lou Gordon	Cleaner
Lindsay McGregor	Projects Support Worker (deceased June 2020)
Michaela Smith	Administrator
Lyndsey Cooper	Administrator
Claire Cox	Administrator
Sarah Stanley	Macmillan Energy Advice Worker
Robert Haley	First Stage Advice Worker (Left March 2020)
Tracey Cartwright	Benefits Advice Worker
Remi Hunter	Benefits Advice Worker
Tony Bage	Income Maximisation Advice Worker

# ANNUAL REVIEW OF ADVICE

## ANNUAL REVIEW OF INTERNAL AUDITING APRIL 2019- MARCH 2020

	No. Files Audited (Audit Meeting)	No of files Randomly Reviewed	No. Corrective Actions Issued	Advisor Initials CARS issued	No. Corrective Actions Outstanding	Audit Files + Random Total Files	Common Theme
Apr-19	0	56	28	TW (21), RH (5), TC (1), RJH(1)	3 (TW)	56	Outcomes, CF1, Procedures
May-19	17	21	16	JAB (1), TC (3), RJH (3), TW (8), RH(1)	3	38	TW (advice, Outcome, CF1, Insufficient notes)
Jun-19	0	15	10	TW(9) RH(1)	0	15	TW (advice, Outcome, CF1, Insufficient notes)
Jul-19	0	15	7		0	15	TW (advice, Outcome, CF1, Insufficient notes)
Aug-19	0	19	16		1	19	GDPR, Notes Calcs
Sep-19	18	16	4		1	33	
Oct-19	0	11	4		0	11	None
Nov-19	0	4	1		0	4	None
Dec-19	12	0	3		0	12	None
Jan-20	0	0	0		0	0	None
Feb-20	0	0	0		0	0	None
Mar-20	38	7	1		0	45	None

	No of Supervised Workers (100% 50% 25%)	No. Files Reviewed	No. Corrective Actions Issued	Common Theme (e.g CARS per Advisor)	No Corrective Actions Outstanding
Apr-19	1 x 100%	38	21	CF1, Outcomes, Stamping, Forms	3
May-19	1 x 50%	15	8	Outcomes, CF1, Advice notes	2
Jun-19	1 x 50%	14	9	Outcomes, CF1, Advice notes	0
Jul-19	1 x 50%	15	7	Outcomes, CF1, Advice notes	0
Aug-19	1 x 50%	12	8	GDPR - Email circulated July	0
Sep-19	1 x 50%	16	7		0
Oct-19	0				
Nov-19	0				
Dec-19	0				
Jan-20	0				
Feb-20	0				
Mar-20	0				

Total Files Reviewed	249
Corrective Actions Issued	90
Corrective Actions completed	90
Common Theme or Corrective Action	CF1's/Outcomes

Annual Review Carried out 7th April 2020	Signed		Alison Thompson Advice Supervisor
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## Client Satisfaction Survey Results

### Customer Service in Summary

When asked how long was the wait from requesting the appointment to your actual appointment date? **70% said they were seen in less than 1 - 2 weeks.**

98% clients said our reception staff communicated clearly.

On average clients rated the advice they received as **9.9** out of a scale of **10**.

We asked the clients how they felt about their general well-being, prior to receiving advice and support on average 10% reported their general well-being as **Very Good**, however after receiving advice and support **60%** reported their general well-being as **Very Good**.

When asked how has this advice/support helped, our clients reported:

- 43% Income likely to improve
- 67% Feel happier
- 32% Worry less about money
- 49 % Feel more able to cope

Smiley/sad face for clients to indicate whether or not they had been helped. 1040 people took part of which 1035 (99.5%) were happy with the service they had received.

*Comments include:*

*“The advice I received was a life saver. I was worrying quite a lot prior to speaking to Angie. I feel a massive weight has been lifted.”*

*“The service has been a very good help to me at all times. Keep up the good work.”*

*“My appointment today was better than I thought it would be, was nervous and anxious before but with the very friendly welcome from the advisor it was put to rest and made me feel a lot better in myself.”*

*‘Hard to get appointment’*

*‘Excellent - feel weight lifted.’*



## Serving the Community

Produced In-house by V Evens April 2019