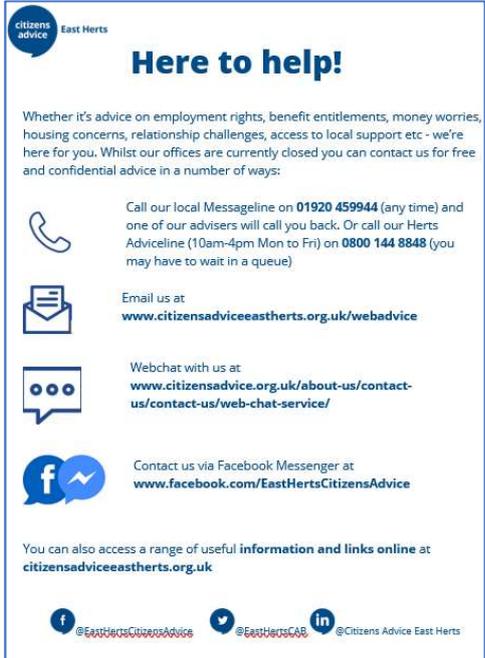


## Working hard to support the local community in response to Covid

These are extraordinary times, but at Citizens Advice East Herts we've embraced the opportunity to find new ways of working which ensure we can meet the needs of our community now and in the future. Thanks to our fantastic team of staff and volunteers we've accelerated much of the service design we were planning pre Covid and have developed a more flexible client offer. This has enabled us to help over 5,000 clients since lockdown (as of end October), even more than the same time period last year. Here are just a few of the ways we've adapted, and redesigned our service:

### Expanded our access channels

People can now contact us via phone, email, webchat and Facebook Messenger. Where someone needs to be seen we can arrange for a home visit or face to face appointment in various centres across the district (subject to Covid). We hope to be able to introduce free phones and computers in various locations so that our most vulnerable clients and those without means can more easily contact us.



**Here to help!**

Whether it's advice on employment rights, benefit entitlements, money worries, housing concerns, relationship challenges, access to local support etc - we're here for you. Whilst our offices are currently closed you can contact us for free and confidential advice in a number of ways:

- Call our local Messageline on **01920 459944** (any time) and one of our advisers will call you back. Or call our Herts Adviceline (10am-4pm Mon to Fri) on **0800 144 8848** (you may have to wait in a queue)
- Email us at [www.citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk/webadvice](http://www.citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk/webadvice)
- Webchat with us at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/web-chat-service/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/web-chat-service/)
- Contact us via Facebook Messenger at [www.facebook.com/EastHertsCitizensAdvice](https://www.facebook.com/EastHertsCitizensAdvice)

You can also access a range of useful information and links online at [citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk](http://citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk)

 @EastHertsCitizensAdvice
  @EastHertsCAR
  @Citizens Advice East Herts

### Invested in Social Media

We've invested resources into building our social media presence, and launched Facebook Messenger and Instagram to help us engage with different client groups. We have been creative, sharing research, stats, client outcomes and feedback.



**Connect with us**







## Embraced New Tech

We've embraced new technology, to keep our staff and volunteers connected and ensure we meet the needs of different client groups. We'll shortly be able to offer advice appointments by video, and will continue to adapt and build this offer in response to feedback. We're also now posting 'bite size' advice videos to help tackle some of the common issues we're helping people with, e.g. redundancy and scams.



## Flexible working

Whilst challenging we've seen many benefits to working remotely and are keen to continue with some form of this in the future. Longer term this can save us money which can be used to develop and improve our service, and invested in training and development. Extending our hours through a more flexible staffing model will allow us to provide advice to clients outside of standard office hours - something we saw demand for in the Access Survey we ran earlier in the year.



CEO Laura Hyde working from home

## Casework Support

As we prepare for the economic downturn we've been investing in caseworkers who can provide specialist support on debt. We now have a team of money advisers and are fundraising to expand the service so we can provide specialist support on housing, benefits and employment.

**Benefits Case Study-** Jennifer\* was shielding due to health issues. One of our advisers called her to check if she needed any support. The conversation highlighted that she was eligible for Attendance Allowance and Severe Disability Premium. The adviser helped her fill in the necessary form over the phone and she's now receiving £156 / week to help her pay for the support she needs in the home.

## Increased Partnership Working

The pandemic has strengthened our partnerships and this closer working is something we'll continue in the future, working with local groups to reach more people at their point of need. We're particularly excited to be working more closely with the Family Centres across East Herts and with CVS on their new 'JobSmart' initiative. As a result of this greater partnership working we've taken the decision to move out of Wallfields in Hertford next May (where we were co-located with the council) and to run outreach from a range of locations, such as the Family Centres – more details to follow! We will also shortly be launching a new online referral tool with key partners.



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*"Thank you very much for all the excellent work which you do for the community. I think that you are needed more than ever now, in this horrible pandemic, and I know that many people have been really grateful for all the help which you have given them. Thank You very much." (Local Councillor)*

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## What's next?

We are committed to evolving our service to ensure we keep helping as many people as possible- whoever they are, whatever their problem. Fundraising will be a big focus of our work next year so that we can expand our community engagement and offer more specialist support. If you would like to know more or get involved in any way please get in touch! Thanks to all our team, partners and supporters – we couldn't do it without you!

For further information see [www.citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk](http://www.citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk) or contact [comms@citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk](mailto:comms@citizensadviceeastherts.org.uk)