



**Improving**

**People's**

**Lives**

**Influencing & Engagement**

# **Impact Report 2021-22**

## IMPROVING PEOPLE'S LIVES

**AdviceUK exists to fight for justice, to improve people's lives, and to achieve beneficial change for our members. Founded in 1979, we are the biggest advice network in the UK with over 650 members in England, Scotland, and Wales. We are completely independent of any government funding which means that we can really challenge those who wield power over people's lives. We have an incredibly diverse membership who work mainly with people in poverty and/or experiencing disadvantage and discrimination. We are here to give a voice to people, to represent them and bring about positive change.**

### OUR INFLUENCING AND ENGAGEMENT WORK

We are really pleased to publish our first-ever annual impact report, describing the work of our Influencing and Engagement team over the last 12 months. We work with over 250 stakeholders as well as with our 650+ members. This report brings to life the work that we have been doing and the impact that this has made.

#### A year of major upheaval and challenge

2021/22 has been a year of unprecedented and dramatic change. The year saw a gradual return to face-to-face delivery of advice services as COVID-19 restrictions were withdrawn. The demand for advice post-pandemic rose sharply towards the end of the year as forbearance measures were lifted and the Universal Credit £20 uplift was removed.

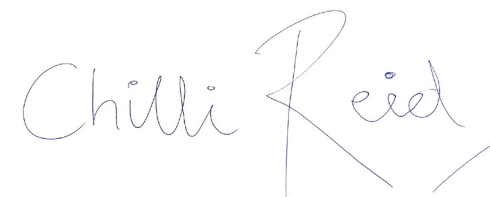
By the end of March 2022, inflation was at 8% and the cost of living crisis was biting. The war in Ukraine had added yet more uncertainty. All this meant that many advice services were more stretched than ever in 2021/22, and this is likely to continue over the next year and beyond. The cost of living crisis is already pushing many more people into poverty and debt. Our members saw more enquiries about welfare benefits than all other areas of social welfare law combined last year and we expect this trend to continue in 2022/23.

This report provides: –

- Examples of how our work has helped improve people's lives
- Examples of how we have improved our members' ability to support the people who use their services
- Statistics demonstrating the impact that our influencing and engagement work had in the year 2021/22.

We are extremely grateful for all the work done by our members, without whom we would not be able to exert influence, and to the stakeholders, partners and collaborators who support our work. We work to challenge those that inflict damage on people's lives and those that damage the ability of AdviceUK members to work with these people.

**Please contact either me or the other members of the team if you would like to know more about what we do and/or would like to join us in the fight to improve people's lives.**



**Chilli Reid, Executive Director**  
chilli.reid@adviceuk.org.uk



# ADVICEUK – THE WAY WE WORK

As a charitable membership organisation we aim to provide public benefit by making a difference to people’s lives through working in two ways:

- By providing a range of support services to our member advice agencies to help them provide the best possible service to the individuals and communities they serve; and
- By influencing the policies and practices of government and corporations that affect the need for and availability of advice

The latter area of work is led by our Influencing and Engagement team.

## OUR INFLUENCING AND ENGAGEMENT WORK

The purposes of our influencing and engagement work are:

- To improve the lives of people facing problems that are the subject of enquiries to advice services
- To reduce the need for advice by improving public and corporate policy-making and operating practices
- To improve the availability, accessibility and effectiveness of advice services by influencing those policies of government, corporations and others that affect their funding and operating environments

To these ends we engage and work with our members to make a difference together.

We also engage with and seek to influence external stakeholders regionally and nationally to achieve beneficial change for our members, the individuals who turn to them for help and ultimately communities in England, Scotland and Wales.

This can be expressed as a triangle, and informs all the work that we do: –



# EXAMPLES OF HOW WE HAVE EXERCISED INFLUENCE

Everything that we do is about people and trying to improve people’s lives in very challenging times. Here are some examples illustrating how we have done this over the last year.

## Protecting access to local debt advice for people in England

Local, community-based advice is vital for many people in helping them to deal with their debt problems. In July last year, the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS), the largest funder of debt advice in England, launched a procurement process for new contracts to replace all its current debt advice funding. Although MaPS’s plans meant that overall funding would increase, its original proposals meant that funding for face-to-face debt advice would have been halved, with most of the MaPS funding going to online and telephone advice. This would have had major implications for people who rely on local community debt advice.

We therefore launched our PRESS PAUSE campaign last December, calling on MaPS to pause its procurement process, engage in a full consultation on its plans and conduct a full equality impact assessment.



On 17 December 2021, MaPS announced that it would not be proceeding with its procurement of regional debt advice services in England. This campaign success helped protect people’s access to local debt advice by securing funding for many AdviceUK members, some of whom faced closure. However, major issues with the future of local debt advice remain, with several AdviceUK members having withdrawn from MaPS funding, the loss of experienced advisers from the sector, low staff morale and a still uncertain future.



**Debt advice groups such as AdviceUK believe that MaPS' vision for debt advice is deeply flawed, does not meet the needs of the diverse communities across England and does not enable the provision of flexible, in-depth and sustainable debt advice services.**

**Emma Hardy MP**  
(Kingston Upon Hull West and Hessle)



**AdviceUK says that MaPS' approach is wrong because it is rooted in a mistaken belief that debt is solely a problem of poor choices by individuals. That needs to be part of a wider conversation about welfare support for the most vulnerable, rising living costs, improving life chances, unstable and poorly paid work...**

**Yvonne Fovargue MP**  
(Makerfield)



## **Protecting people's access to specialist legal advice**

Due to the 2012 cuts to Legal Aid and the impact of austerity on local authority budgets, over the last decade more and more people have been finding it difficult to get the specialist legal advice they need, and many specialist legal advice providers have been under threat of closure. These problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

We helped the Community Justice Fund (CJF) develop its funding programme designed to provide emergency financial support to specialist legal advice providers. We pushed for changes to the criteria for receiving funding so that 90 AdviceUK members were able to apply rather than just 40 and we supported members with their bids.

AdviceUK members have so far received £3 million from the CJF and as a result have been able to continue to give people specialist legal advice. This vital funding has saved some AdviceUK members from closure. It has helped to keep people alive, maintain their liberty keep people in their homes, with their utilities supplied and their goods protected.

"It has been invaluable to have AdviceUK's support and expertise throughout the development of the Community Justice Fund. I think we have achieved far more as a partnership than we ever could have done otherwise. We look forward to continuing to work closely with AdviceUK as we develop a long-term strategy for the Community Justice Fund."

**Clare Carter**  
Joint CEO, Access to Justice



## Giving a voice to people without means and improving access to justice

It is vital that people who receive advice are not just talked about but can have their voices heard. We do this on a regular basis and are invited to speak at events because we speak honestly and forcefully about what is really happening in people's lives.

Perhaps the highest profile and most influential of these events was the Civil Justice Council Annual Conference on Access to Justice for those without means, which was held in December 2021 and attended by 100 people in person and over 300 people online, including the Attorney General, senior civil servants, lawyers, advice sector leaders, the Ministry of Justice, Legal Aid Agency, HM Courts & Tribunals Service, senior judiciary, journalists, and some AdviceUK members.

We were invited to speak on a panel alongside the President of the Law Society, the Director of Access to Justice at the Ministry of Justice and the CEO of We are Digital. We were able to talk about some of our main priorities and supplied evidence in key areas of policy, including the negative impact of the MaPS commissioning process on the sector.

Invitations to speak at such events are an important part of our influencing work. It means that we can lever in support that enables our members to carry out work that is transformative in changing lives: enabling some of the poorest people in our society to keep their liberty, their homes, and their utilities and goods.



## Enabling more people to access debt advice in Scotland

In 2020, we were successful in securing £670,000 in funding from the Scottish Government under devolved debt levy funding which we directed 38 separate projects run by 29 Scottish AdviceUK members. This was the first time that our members in Scotland had received funding from the Scottish Government.

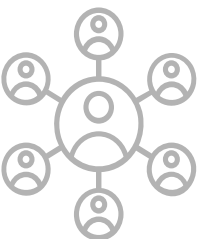
As a result of this funding, we were able to report to the Scottish Government in April 2021 that an additional 2,630 people from 29 local authority areas across the country were able to receive debt advice. Over £3.6 million of debt was dealt with and the people helped received financial gains of more than £1.1 million.



REACHING STAKEHOLDERS AND MEMBERS

We worked directly with

187 people from



133

different stakeholder organisations

We worked directly with

498

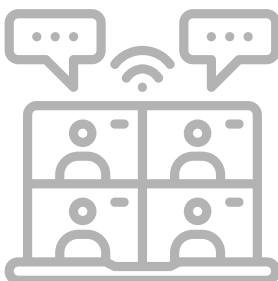
people working for



295

AdviceUK members

180 members attended



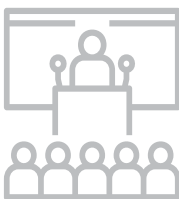
6

fora we held for our Scottish members

We were invited to speak at

16 events

and attended meetings of



39

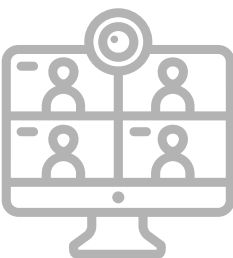
different fora organised by stakeholder organisations

154

people working for AdviceUK members attended our two 'Three Starters and a Dessert' events



We hosted

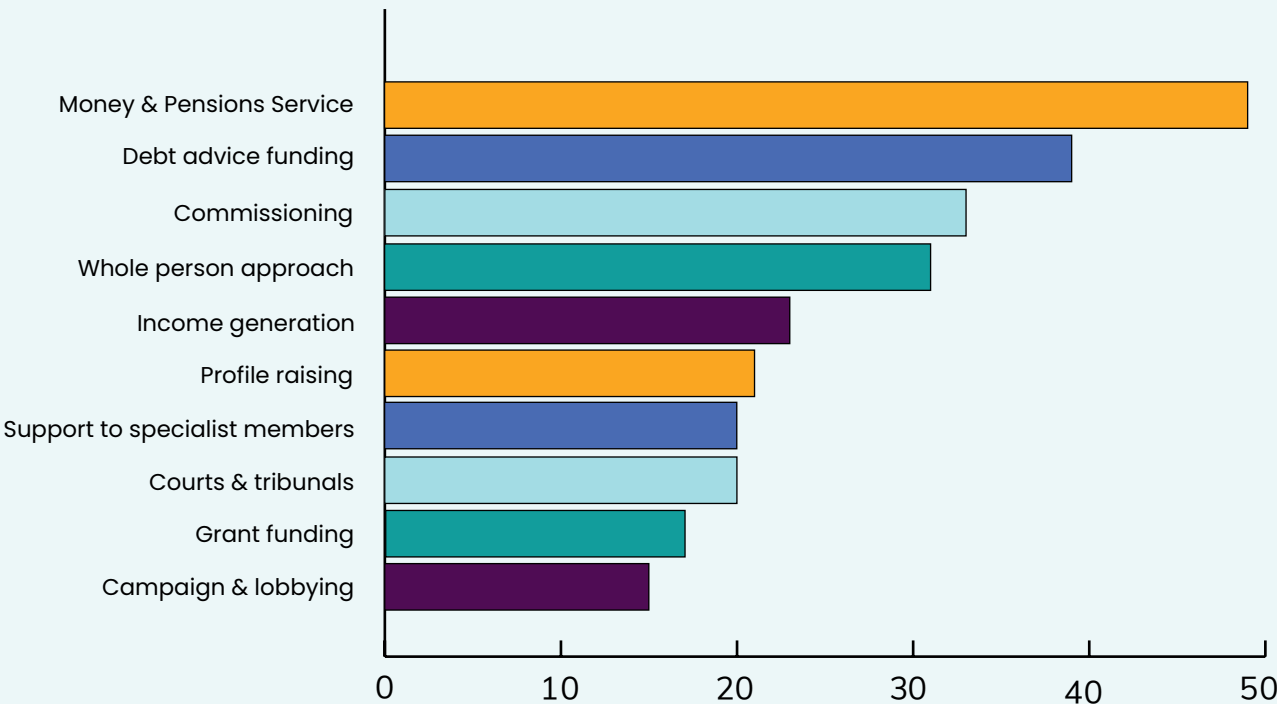


45

online member drop-in sessions

In 2021/22, we engaged with our members on over 800 different issues. The top 10 issues we helped with were:

Top 10 Issues





## EXAMPLES OF HOW WE HAVE ENGAGED WITH OUR MEMBERS

**Our members have an important role to play in bringing about not just local but also national changes based on local insights and experiences. A major part of our work is helping them to do this. Here are some examples of how we have engaged with them in the last year to further develop our collective influence.**

### Using digital technologies

Our members amass an immense amount of real time information about problems being experienced by people across England, Scotland and Wales. They see immediately the effects of new economic pressures on the families and communities least able to cope with them. They gain insights every day into whether the policies and operating practices of government and corporations are benefitting people or making their lives more difficult. AdviceUK's Influencing and Engagement team brings such evidence to bear on policy makers.

Information and computer technology (ICT) can undoubtedly deliver a step-change in our ability to gather such evidence efficiently and use it to strengthen our voice and influence. We have assisted members to assess how and where to deploy ICT and encouraged its use, not just to improve services but also for data collection, analysis and reporting. Members are now more competitive when applying for funding because they can better demonstrate the nature and effects of their work. Over half of them now use our AdvicePro case management system, allowing us to collate and analyse anonymised client data to inform and support our influencing work. Our eventual aim is to have almost all members using the system.



### Improving how we communicate with our members

In order to strengthen our ability to make a difference together we need to improve communications and networking with and between our members. Over the past year, utilising new ICT capabilities, we have improved the way in which we communicate with our members in several ways.

#### Running online events



We ran two Three Starters and a Dessert online events, which were attended by 154 people working for our members.

Throughout the year we also ran regular bi-monthly fora for our Scottish members, which included sessions with health bodies, the Scottish Government and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). All the fora were attended by more than 30 people.

#### Producing regular email bulletins

We have provided frequent contributions to our fortnightly email bulletins to members as well as a regular funding update.

In Scotland, we produced regular weekly and monthly bulletins for our members.





## WHAT OUR MEMBERS THINK...

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**We really value our membership of AdviceUK; it gives us a recognised platform to lobby for change and influence stakeholders at a national level and the impact of this work is being highlighted directly to the Scottish Government. Some of the projects that we have been able to roll out have been as a direct result of our AdviceUK membership.**

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## BRINGING DIVERSE MEMBERS TOGETHER

**One of the great strengths of AdviceUK is the diversity of its membership.**

It is really important that we bring members with common interests and challenges together to share learning and make connections. These opportunities to network and consider the bigger picture are particularly important at this time when our members and their clients are facing unprecedented challenges.

We have several distinct advice constituencies within our membership focusing on particular advice topics or on particular communities of interest and need. We have worked with our student union members on issues such as file review and conflicts of interest and have also worked closely with our housing association members in Scotland. Many have deep expertise while others have unique reach and insights into their communities.

In the past year we have brought together members in our debt advice and minority communities constituencies to organise around particular threats and opportunities. We are expanding this area of activity as we continue to enhance our ICT capabilities and increase the capacity of the team.

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**We have heard from the Access to Justice Foundation that we have been awarded a grant for expanding our pro-bono advice.... I wanted to let you know, as I never would have gone for this if it hadn't been for the strong encouragement you gave me! ... huge thanks to you ... I very much appreciate all your help and support.**

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EXAMPLE OF HOW OUR MEMBERS HELPED PEOPLE IN 2021-22

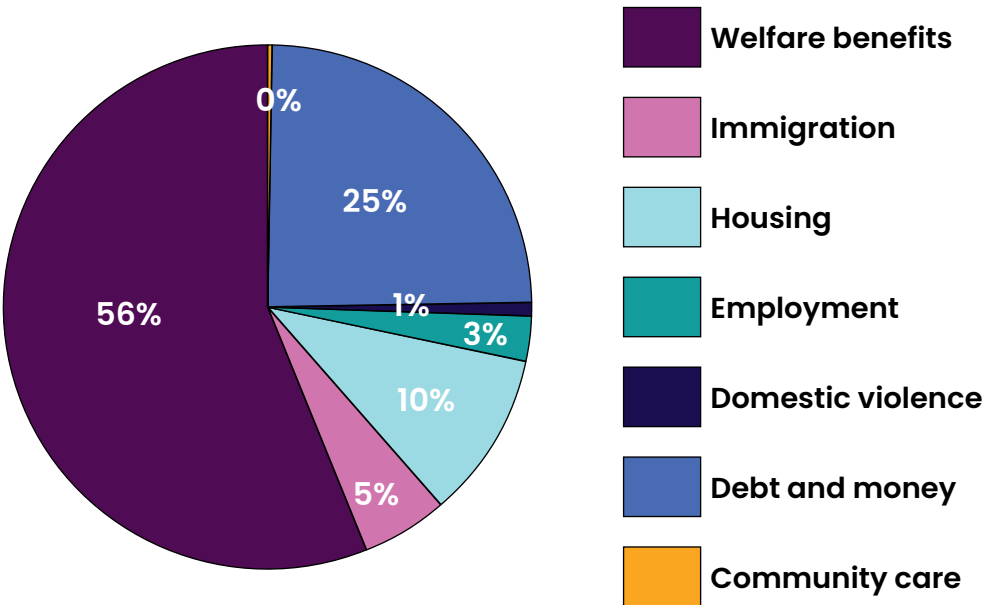
Those of our members using our AdvicePro case management system recorded that they dealt with more than 375,000 cases in 2021-22.

The top 7 categories of enquiry were:

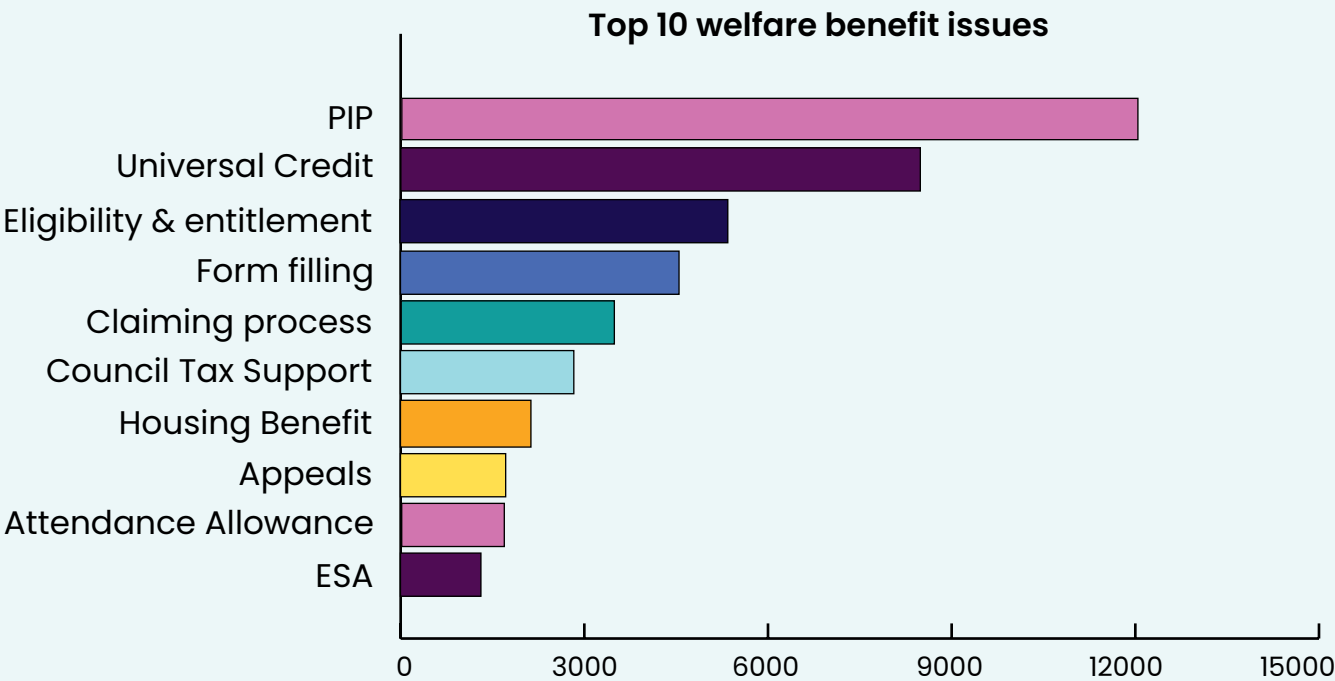
Area of social welfare law	No. of cases
Welfare benefits	209908
Debt and money	91955
Housing	38097
Immigration	20328
Employment	10959
Domestic violence	2726
Community care	1313
TOTAL	375286

Over half of the total number of cases seen dealt with welfare benefits issues. Debt advice issues accounted for a quarter of all cases.

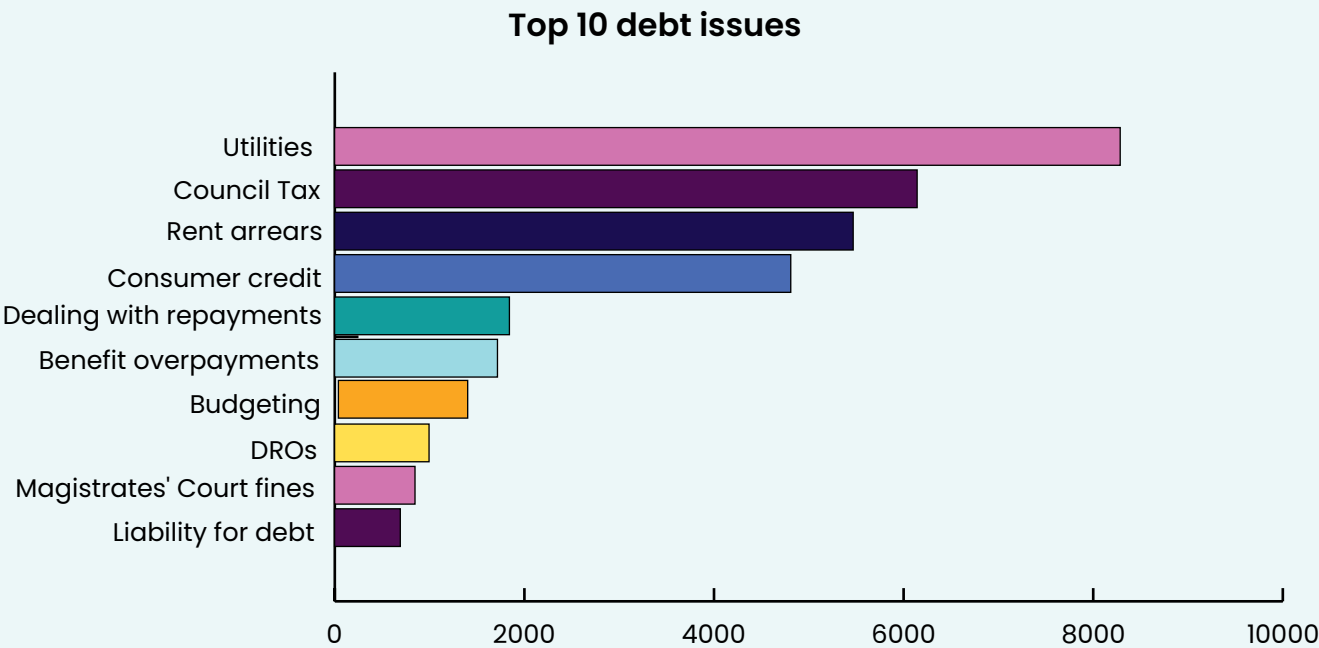
Case category percentages



The top welfare benefits issue dealt with in 2021/22 was the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), followed by enquiries on Universal Credit.



Utilities was the biggest debt issue seen in 2021/22, followed by Council Tax arrears, rent arrears and consumer credit debt.



To find out more about AdvicePro please visit <https://advicepro.org.uk>



## LOOKING AHEAD

**We already know that 2022–23 is going to be a very challenging year for many millions of people. By the end of March 2022, inflation was running at 8% and expected to go higher. A cost of living crisis was emerging and the war in Ukraine was adding yet more uncertainty.**

For advice agencies, there had been a gradual return to face-to-face delivery as COVID-19 restrictions were withdrawn and there was a sharp increase in demand as forbearance measures were lifted and the Universal Credit £20 uplift was removed. Many advice agencies therefore began 2022–23 more stretched than ever with the cost of living crisis looking set to push millions more people into poverty and debt. Our members already received more enquiries about welfare benefits than about anything else last year and the numbers look certain to increase in 2022–23.

Welfare benefits, debt and the cost of living crisis are therefore certain to be the main focuses of our influencing and engagement work in 2022/23. Other issues might arise but these three areas will be our main priorities.

### Welfare benefits

We know from decades of advice sector experience that the administration of welfare benefits is appallingly inefficient and wasteful and that this creates its own additional measure of misery for claimants. Labyrinthine bureaucracy, unintelligible communications and inexplicable delays too often make claimants' situations worse rather than better. If the purpose of the system is to efficiently get financial support to the people whom parliament has decided need it (and who are therefore entitled to it) then it is a failing system. Advice agencies encounter its failings in their hundreds every day. We will seek to engage with our members to shine a light on such failings and work with the Department for Work and Pensions with the aim of improving its systems.

### The future of debt advice

We will be continuing with our “PRESS” campaign concerning the funding of debt advice by the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS). We believe that MaPS's ill thought-out, top-down plans will actually damage the provision of debt advice and make it less effective and accessible for the people who desperately need it. We are far from alone in that view. Having achieved some success in the “PAUSE” phase of our campaign, we have already embarked on a “RESET” phase in which we will continue working with our members and other groups, such as We Are Debt Advisers, the Unite Debt Advice Network and the Institute of Money Advisers, to engage with MaPS to achieve a reset in their thinking. Central to this will be engaging with a group of members to develop an alternative vision for the future of debt advice.

### The cost of living

It is already clear that many people are struggling to meet their essential living costs and, in particular, are struggling to pay their energy bills. Over the next year we will be analysing data from our AdvicePro case management system on the number of clients who have deficit budgets and who are in fuel poverty. We will use this data when working with government, regulators and the energy companies.

### Gearing up

In order to pursue these campaigns effectively we need to increase our leverage – to which we see data and profile as being key. We will need to improve the ways in which we communicate and engage with our members. We need to communicate more purposefully and make engagement as easy and least time-consuming as possible.

To enable this, Advice UK is continuing to invest in influencing and engagement capacity and in digital systems. During the coming year we will be piloting engagement and organising with groups of our members using digital channels.

### Developing the Whole Person, Whole Community Approach

AdviceUK believes that for advice to make a difference, it needs to be better connected with the things that matter to individuals and the diverse communities to which they belong. We have been working with our members to develop what we've called the Whole Person, Whole Community Approach. It gives a powerful way of thinking about any advice-giving activity, resource or service. We believe that it has the potential both to radically improve people's experiences of getting help and support, and the ways in which advice services are funded and commissioned.

We now have a wide range of resources that members can use to explore how to apply the Whole Person, Whole Community Approach in their own situation. We are also developing resources that can be used by others with interests in advice, including key trusts and foundations and local authorities.

**Get in touch if you would like to know more! You will find our contact details on the back page of this report.**



## HOW TO CONTACT US

If you would like to find out more, or are interested in working with us, please email [influencing@adviceuk.org.uk](mailto:influencing@adviceuk.org.uk).

You can also contact the members of our Influencing and Engagement team directly:



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You can find information about our influencing work on our website.

### If you are an AdviceUK member:

- You and your colleagues can sign up to our fortnightly member newsletter at: [newsletter@adviceuk.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@adviceuk.org.uk)
- You can use the Member Resources on the AdviceUK Portal

### If you are a stakeholder:

- You can get your colleagues to sign up for our quarterly stakeholder newsletter