

Citizens Advice Taunton shuts one day per week, for the first time ever

Following the recent Somerset County Council funding cut Citizens Advice Taunton will be closing its drop-in service on Wednesdays from March 13th and changing its late opening session to Tuesdays evenings. The cut amounts to £85k per year which is 1/3rd of the charity's unrestricted funding, and therefore represents a critical change going forward.

Jon Shoesmith, Chief Officer, explained *"we are extremely saddened that we have to reduce our opening hours. We simply have to bring overheads down somehow, and even after closing one day per week it will still leave us with a deficit to resolve in the future"*.

Citizens Advice Taunton saw 6,640 clients in 2018/19, helping them with 20,225 issues. The majority of the staff are volunteers and the organisation therefore runs on staggeringly low overheads already. Jon added *"we are absolutely determined to minimise the impact of this change on clients. We have looked at different ways of delivering the service, and at how we can work in greater partnership with other Citizens Advice offices in Somerset. Taunton Deane Borough Council have been extremely supportive, as have lots of our other partners, and we are determined to do all we can to resolve the remaining deficit without further impact on the people who need our service"*.

Demand for Citizens Advice is increasing, and the availability of support and advice services in general has reduced markedly in recent years. An increasing number of clients with complex needs and significant health conditions rely on Citizens Advice as one of the services that are still there for them. As such it is becoming more and more important, partly because the service is so wide ranging and allows people to seek help with absolutely any advice issue they have.

Citizens Advice Taunton will still be open on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays 10.00 – 2.00 and on Tuesdays 2.00 – 6.30. In addition, clients can phone the telephone service on 03444 889 623 Monday to Friday 10.00 – 4.00, and can also email their issue via the website.

Many do not realise Citizens Advice Taunton is a charity. To donate you can go to the home page of their website (www.citizensadvicetaunton.org.uk) or write to St. Mary's House, Magdalene Street, Taunton, TA1 1SB. *"We are particularly seeking support from local business, to whom we can offer a mutually beneficial partnership, and from local residents who can afford to commit regular monthly payments. We simply have to broaden our income streams and we really need the community's help with this",* Jon said.

In response to the cut the charity has reduced its paid staffing by 20%, and its 70+ volunteers are now directly trained and supported by just 2.3 full time equivalent paid staff. If you want to support the team please enquire about volunteering by emailing recruitment@tauntoncab.org.uk