

North Tyneside Citizens Advice – Written Evidence (LBC0086)

Are there any positives you would take from this pandemic?

The pandemic has given us an opportunity to develop more flexible working methods, including remote working and a more robust digital offer. As a service we will continue to shift towards more of a telephone and digital model, providing less face to face advice but while being sensitive to the needs of vulnerable or excluded clients.

The challenges posed by the lockdown have also helped encourage more collaborative working with other local charities and stakeholders – we are currently embarking on a joint project to address digital exclusion across the borough and ensure vulnerable residents are not left behind.

What are the things that you are most worried about?

We anticipate a significant challenge to both our service and the wider community from the long term economic impact of the pandemic, as well as the possible effects of any European Union trade deal. Many of the people we advise are likely to be placed in precarious and variable working conditions with very little employment protection, which will create corresponding pressures upon their finances. A recent report by national Citizens Advice, [An Unequal Crisis](#), warns that the effects will be disproportionately felt by the disabled or those with caring responsibilities.

We expect a significant rise in queries about Benefits, Debt, Employment and Housing problems as a result of the above, all of which will place corresponding pressures upon our service due to increased demand. In the time since the lockdown first started (16th March to 10th August) we have already seen a **236%** increase in Employment queries compared to the same period last year.

We also anticipate similar demands being placed on the benefit system – [DWP figures](#) have already shown an increase of half a million claimants in May 2020.

What do you most hope changes for the better?

We would like to see amendments to the benefit system to reduce the financial difficulty faced by new claimants and better acknowledge the challenges of the labour market, increased security for short term employees and for private rented tenants, and provision of sufficient resources to services supporting those worst affected by the forthcoming economic impact. All of these safeguards would help ameliorate the worst effects of the pandemic upon our most vulnerable citizens.

12 August 2020