

Please find below our stats for the number of clients we have helped in the Thatcham Wards and the whole of West Berkshire over the last few years.

Number of Clients			
	Thatcham Wards	West Berkshire	% of total
2019-20	455	1847	24.6%
2020-21	267	1198	22.3%
2021-22	323	1449	22.3%
2022-23	340	1568	21.7%
2023-24	475	1971	24.1%
2024-25 Q1	134	593	22.6%

In 2019-20 and the years before that, CAWB was running an outreach service in two surgeries in Thatcham. We had a maximum of two appointments available to Thatcham residents per week for this, allowing us to **see up to 104 clients annually in our Thatcham outreach surgeries**. The remainder of the Thatcham clients were either helped face-to-face in our Newbury office or by telephone or email (in 2019-20 a further 351 clients).

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and government lockdown, we were forced to close our face-to-face services and then did telephone and email support only for our clients.

In 2022-23, when we returned to the office, we had fewer advisers and staff, and some volunteer advisers chose to continue to work from home. This meant that we no longer had sufficient resources to continue to offer face-to-face appointments in Thatcham. We are presently working on expanding our frontline advice delivery, but this is a long-term plan, as it takes approximately 6 months for a new adviser to learn the foundation to start seeing clients. So far in 2024, we have recruited 3 new volunteer advisers, and one new trainee staff supervisor. Despite these challenges, 2023-24 was our busiest year of the last 5, and 2024-25 is expected to be busier.

In 2020-21, the government put in a number of policies to help individuals through the COVID crisis – e.g. the Furlough Scheme, Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, Universal Credit uplift, eviction ban, mortgage payment holidays, Test and Trace Support Payment and also increased funding for Local Authorities to provide financial support. This all significantly reduced the demand for advice services and we therefore saw a decrease in number of clients from the Thatcham wards as well as throughout the entire West Berkshire Council area, as shown in the table above.

However, as this support scaled back post-Covid, demand for our services returned and increased with 2023-24 seeing Thatcham residents remaining as 1 in 4 of our clients.

As the government protection measures stopped and life returned to “normality”, the number of clients needing our support increased.

Although we have not run a face-to-face outreach service in Thatcham, in the year 2023-24, we supported 475 clients from the Thatcham wards, compared to 455 clients in 2019-20, marking a 6.7% increase.

In the first quarter of 2024-25, we have already spoken to 134 clients in the Thatcham wards. This means that there has been an increase of 13% of Thatcham constituents coming to us for help, compared to the previous year.

Due to loss of resources over the last few years, as well as having to adapt to the new ways that the clients want to reach us, we have had to change the way we work. We are currently running an initial assessment/advice service, mostly over the phone. We are also offering telephone or face-to-face appointments, dependent on clients' needs and expectations. We are still doing complex casework with our clients (such as help with debt), as well as helping them to fill in forms or budget sheets.

We know from feedback that a fair percentage of our clients prefer telephone advice.

We are able to offer clients in hardship refunds for their bus or train fare if they come to us for a face-to-face appointment but cannot send this money to clients in advance of them visiting us. This is because we work in collaboration with St Nicholas Church who provide us with a small grant to cover such expenses.

Now that we are fully staffed and are in the process of training our new staff and more volunteers, we would like to look towards restarting outreach in the future. However, in order to do outreach appointments, an adviser needs to be experienced as they would be working on their own, albeit with remote supervision, and we would need to find volunteers who would like to do this. We will in the next six months or so, have enough resources to be able to ask anyone if they are interested.

I hope this helps but please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information.

Kind Regards,



Isabel Esperança

Chief Officer