

# Citizens Advice - A change in delivery 2021



citizens  
advice

Lindsey



**Citizens Advice was commissioned to give advice and advocacy to people over the age of 50 in the East Lindsey area.**

They were commissioned as part of the TED Programme to see people for appointments in the Louth, Mablethorpe and Skegness Citizens Advice offices and also at drop in centres at Marisco Medical Practice, Mablethorpe, The New Life Centre, Spilsby and Horncastle Library.

The project offered people help across a wide range of issues including;

- Benefits: benefit checks, filling in forms and appeals
- Debts: simple queries dealt with
- Referrals to our specialist debt advisers, Employment, Consumer and Housing queries.

From the 1st March 2020, the Specialist Adviser TED noticed that attendance at the drop in sessions by older persons had started to reduce. The average weekly attendance at the drop in sessions was usually 6-8 per week, but this dropped to 4 on the second week of March and then just 1 on the 3rd week of March.

On 17th March, Marisco Medical Practice announced it would be closing their information centre and both Citizens Advice and TED also advised that face to face appointments should be suspended, resulting in drop-in sessions being cancelled.



TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by YMCA Lincolnshire

For the appointments that Citizens Advice were facilitating, people could also attend drop in sessions at the Skegness, Louth and Mablethorpe Offices or call the Citizens Advice Adviceline. These clients over the age of 50 are then referred for an appointment with the Specialist Adviser TED, these appointments are then held at the office nearest to the client.

Looking back at the ages of clients and the issues they attended with, they noticed that the ages of the clients ranged from 57-81 years with the majority being over 70, but they were still attending appointments rather than self-isolating.

When looking into the issues that clients were attending with, all of them required help to complete a Health benefit application form for a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Attendance Allowance (AA). These forms have a date by which they have to be returned and at this time clients could ask for a few weeks extension but nothing more (whereas now clients are being granted a 3 month extension). So the clients may have felt they had no other option other than to attend their appointments.

Since March 23rd all appointments have been telephone appointments. Clients have been contacting the Adviceline and getting referred to the client's relevant office where they can then arrange a telephone appointment, to go through their issues. Adviceline is a Citizens Advice National telephone service and contact details have been passed on to all drop in session venues, TED and other commissioned services, Job centres, Local and District councils and the internet etc.

The Specialist Adviser TED usually sees on average 14 people per week for face to face appointments and drop in sessions. For the 4 weeks, they have been providing telephone appointments instead of face to face, in which they have been advising an average of 7-8 people per week.

The majority of telephone appointments have been benefit appeals and Mandatory Reconsiderations. A face to face appointment for these types of issues usually takes a 1 hour appointment and then 1 hour to write a letter of grounds and to write up the case.

These type of cases are taking longer over the telephone for several reasons:

- Harder to keep the client focused on the questions asked and they can start talking about non relevant information, this happens also during face to face appointments but it is easier to interrupt the client and get them back on track with body language and hand gestures etc.
- Medical evidence and prescriptions - The Specialist Adviser TED usually writes this information from letters, prescriptions etc. They were relying on the client to read out letters and spell out medication, which can make it difficult to understand especially if the client has low literacy levels.
- Client authority - The Specialist Adviser TED usually asks the client to sign a completed client authority form which then is sent in with the appeal letter etc. As a result they were having to email the receptionist at Skegness, who then prints off this information and then sends it out to the client who then has to read, check and sign and send off - which all takes a longer amount of time. This has great significance when there is a 1 month time limit for appealing decisions.



As other services were altering their rules and guidelines, any new claims for Health benefits were now being given a 3 month extension to complete the application forms. As long as the form has been requested over the phone the paper form does not need to be completed until a later date. If it is then awarded this will be back-dated. Health assessments were also being put on hold for at least 3 months so there was no new Mandatory Reconsiderations coming through, but of course although these things help now they expect to see a huge influx of these cases once they return to face to face appointments.

As older people prefer face to face appointments, many who Citizens Advice have worked with would prefer seeing someone as they feel they can explain their situation easier. The Specialist Adviser TED has seen this in the past when telephoning or signposting clients to other services.

## Social Distancing Case Study

At the start of the social distancing the Specialist Adviser TED had a client who was due for a face to face appointment for help completing a PIP form which was a new claim. The Adviser telephoned the client to explain that all face to face appointments were being suspended, but she could have a telephone appointment if she was happy to. The woman was advised that she could either post her form into the Local Citizens Advice office and then the Adviser would call her back so that they could complete it over the phone with her. The document would then be sent back to the woman to check and sign off.

The alternate version would be that the Adviser would talk her through completing the application form whilst on the phone. She opted for the second option due to wanting to get the form returned and not wanting to wait for the time taken to send out, complete, send back and then send off.

After an hour and a half telephone call with the woman, she had completed 15 of the 30 pages and she needed to stop and rest. It was decided that the other half of the form would be completed on the next day, which took another hour and a half telephone call. The Specialist Adviser TED had to write up the notes on this case, so the whole appointment had taken 3 and a half hours over two days.

Thankfully now the guidelines on new claims means she would have been given a 3 month extension and so could have waited for a face to face appointment. As the TED Programme Common Measurement Framework (CMF) survey could no longer be completed with clients due to social distancing, during the telephone appointments the Adviser has been sharing information on TED and the other commissioned services where needed.

Shared by Marissa Ward (Specialist Adviser TED at Citizens Advice)



# About East Lindsey



East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness
- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities
- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have over 1800 registered TED members, and over 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award.

## Further information...

To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website [www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk](http://www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk) or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: [@ted\\_EastLindsey](https://twitter.com/ted_EastLindsey)



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