Impact Report
2025/26

Changing lives
Asserting rights
Eliminating inequality

NORFOLK COMMUNITY LAW SERVICE

Thoughts from our CEO

I'm very sad to say that this will be my last Impact Report introduction as CEO of Norfolk Community Law Service – as I prepare for a new challenge leading the St Martin's charity in Norwich.

The last three years in this role have absolutely flown by and I have been incredibly proud to lead an organisation that has such a profound positive impact on people's lives and a team that is so dedicated in their pursuit of fairness and equality for all. I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, our Board, our volunteers and all of our supporters for their efforts during my time at the helm. Norfolk is very lucky to have NCLS and I shall miss those many people who combine to make it such an effective charity. Looking back on the 12 months of 2025/26, it is very clear the need for NCLS and its services is greater than ever and an increasing number of people are finding it hard to secure access to justice, so turning to organisations like ours for support. Demand remains very high and our teams work incredibly hard to ensure everyone that comes to us receives the support they need at the earliest opportunity. Quality advice and guidance remains at the heart of everything we try to do.

However, there is no denying that meeting this demand continues to be a great challenge, especially given the fact that we are finding people's issues increasingly more complex and therefore even harder to pick apart. What this Impact Report spells out is the real and very tangible difference NCLS makes to the lives of those people we support. In our Debt and Welfare Teams alone a staggering £5.5m was recouped in benefits or cleared in debts during the year. What an amazing difference that will have made to people's lives.

Elsewhere, we see the benefits of our work every single day, whether it's in the young mum given a voice in her fight for contact with her children, a domestic abuse victim denied support, someone who has been wrongfully dismissed but can't afford representation or a family looking for a fresh start in this county.

2025/26 was another year to be proud of for so many reasons, including the continued celebrations of our 40th anniversary, a superb law lecture involving both Baroness Shami Chakrabarti and Lady Brenda Hale and increased growth of services in harder to reach parts of the county, in particular West Norfolk.

Funding remains our greatest challenge, as it so often is across this sector. I am proud, however, that our Fundraising Team has responded so effectively, securing several notable successes during the year. Overall, my hope is that I hand over the baton to our next CEO with the charity in a strong place to continue to rise to the many challenges faced by our clients when being denied access to justice.

David Powles

David Powles Chief Executive Officer

What our client said:

"It was brilliant. My outcome couldn't have been better so I'm really grateful! After months of stress my appeal was resolved in under a month and I now feel a huge weight has been lifted.

From our Chair...

As you read this 2025-2026 Impact Report, I hope you will agree that NCLS has had another outstanding year. I am so proud to see the range of clients we have helped across our services, when demand has been increasing, funding has become more difficult and the complexity of the issues which our clients face has grown. Our heartfelt thanks go to our staff, volunteers, trustees, fundraisers and funders for their tremendous work in making this possible. I write this just a few days after a Trustee away day when we had the privilege of hearing four of our clients talk about how our wonderful team was able to help them. It was both humbling and uplifting. It is the difference which our people make to the lives of those who we help which is extraordinary. This last year we have enjoyed celebrating our 40th anniversary. As well as the many events which were held, we were privileged to hear from some of our early founders. Their vision and determination to establish this critical service in the face of adversity was impressive and to them we owe a great debt of thanks. This year has seen the departure of my predecessor Sarah Blunden as our Chair who has chaired the Board so thoughtfully over several years, and we will shortly see the departure of David Powles who in his three years as CEO has made a tremendous contribution to NCLS for which we will be always grateful. They will both be sorely missed. We wish David well in his well-deserved new role. We are excited to welcome Kate Price as our new CEO. NCLS will once again rise to the challenge as it enters its fifth decade of service to the people of Norfolk, resilient and determined to continue to change people's lives for the better.

Laurence Harris
Chair of the Trustees

Kate Price to lead Norfolk Community Law Service

Norfolk Community Law Service has appointed Kate Price as its new CEO. Kate is currently the Assistant Director, Communities at Ipswich Borough Council; before that she spent six years at Norwich City Council as the Neighbourhood and Community Enabling Manager. She will begin the role in October.

The appointment follows current CEO David Powles stepping down to become the new CEO of homelessness charity St Martins.

We change lives by providing access to justice and equality in Norfolk

The right to a fair hearing or trial is something that all are entitled to, but many have to go without. Our support helps give people a voice and enables them to challenge decisions that affect their lives. We help keep people in jobs; safe; in their homes; in this country; out of poverty and destitution; and help them experience improved physical and mental wellbeing.

VISION
We help to satisfy unmet legal need through free, impartial and confidential legal advice, therefore contributing to a just and fair society

MISSION
To empower the people of Norfolk to assert their legal rights, using advice, education and representation

Our services across Norfolk include:

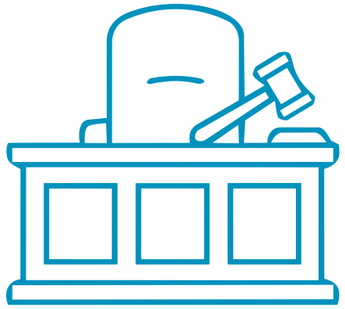
- **Weekly Free Legal Advice clinics**
- **Social welfare solicitor**
- **Debt and money advice**
- **Welfare rights advice and representation at appeals**
- **Legal advice for victims of domestic abuse**
- **Family Court Support Service**
- **Outreach service**
- **Immigration advice**
- **Rent arrears mediation for Norwich City Council tenants**

Our impact

Total clients of all services

2021/22	3,269
2022/23	3,818
2023/24	4,512
2024/25	4,645
2025/26	4,243

Up 30% since 2021/22



We helped
4,243 clients with
5,071 legal issues
across Norfolk

Total number of cases across all services

Service	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Debt	734	682	560
Domestic abuse	174	174	188
Family	540	486	483
Free Legal Advice	1,810	1,729	2,092
Immigration	812	1,053	1,012
Outreach	210	257	250
Rent mediation	21	18	20
Welfare rights	515	569	455
Other	9	3	1
Total	**4,825**	**4,971**	**5,071**

Clients by Local Authority area

	Total	% of clients
Breckland	466	11%
Broadland	427	10%
Great Yarmouth	328	8%
King's Lynn & West Norfolk	345	8%
North Norfolk	351	8%
Norwich	1694	40%
South Norfolk	460	11%
Other	172	4%
Total	**4,243**	**100%**

52% of our clients are receiving benefits

26% of our clients suffer from mental ill health

62% of our clients are female

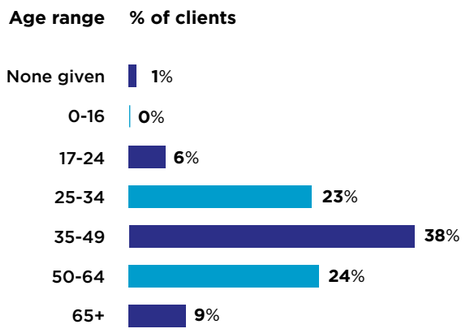
25% of our clients are from an ethnic minority

15% of our clients are physically disabled

15% of our clients have a long-term health condition

32 languages spoken by clients, including sign language

Age range – new clients



What our client said:

"Thank you so very, very much for all your expertise and hard work, it is such essential work and we are so lucky to have you and all of NCLS.

2025/26 highlights

- **Five new members to the Board** who were Sir Norman Lamb, Ros Brown, Cassie Cox, Jade Hunter and Nicki Bramford
- **Amazing 40th anniversary gala event which raised more than £17,000** for the charity
- **More than 120 people** attended our official office opening party
- **50-plus guests including Lord Mayor and Sheriff of Norwich** attended Civic Reception to mark 40 years of the charity
- **Law Lecture featuring both Lady Brenda Hale and Baroness Shami Chakrabarti**

- **Our Welfare Rights manager Charlie Sayer was nominated as Legal Hero at the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society Awards**. NCLS was also nominated for its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work. Former chair and current Supporters' Group chair Ben Keane won Legal Hero of the Year.
- **Continued expansion of our outreach work** at more than 20 venues across the county
- **Expanded our work in King's Lynn** by launching specific debt sessions in the town
- **Invited to parliament to meet Justice and Courts Minister Sarah Sackman** to discuss issues around access to legal aid in Norfolk

- **Lobbied Parliament with several Norfolk MPs** as part of the **#AdviceSaves** campaign
- **Our CEO hosted the West Norfolk launch of the Norfolk Anti-Poverty Alliance**
- **Welfare Rights case worker Vaughan Thomas was recognised at a Norwich City Council full council meeting for his 25 years as a Welfare Rights worker,** helping many vulnerable people obtain the help they are entitled to, both in Norwich and elsewhere
- **CEO David Powles was named as Vice-Chair** of the Broadland Health and Wellbeing Partnership

Our campaigning

During 2025/26 NCLS repeatedly highlighted the shocking lack of availability of legal aid in Norfolk, in particular for victims of domestic abuse.

In March 2026, our CEO David Powles visited the House of Commons with North Norfolk MP Steff Aquarone to discuss the issue with Sarah Sackman, Minister of State for Courts and Legal Services.

We are backing the Law Society's campaign on the issue and opposite is an extract from an article the Law Society produced in conjunction with NCLS and one of its clients.

What our client said:

"I just want to say thank you so much for all your patience, help and support these past months. There are not many services left where you get to speak to a human and are treated like a human being.

"It was one of the worst days of my life"

My daughter is the most important thing in my life. Sitting on my own in court, representing myself in a contact hearing that would change our lives, I felt as if no one was on my side.

I almost forgot my own name when asked to confirm it. I still don't understand most of what happened. It was one of the worst days of my life. I can't remember the specific details of why I didn't qualify for legal aid. I've put it all in a box in my mind.

I googled lawyers who take on legal aid clients and filled in some paperwork. I'm on a low-income, so I have no idea why I wasn't financially eligible. I think the lawyers felt the domestic abuse pathway could help me qualify, but because I hadn't reported it to the police and there was no paper trail, they emailed me to say I unfortunately wasn't eligible. It didn't feel fair that I was up against someone with money who had his own barrister. I didn't have the same opportunity. The barrister was saying things I didn't understand. It's not morally right for people to go through this alone. Towards the end of the legal process, I had support from Norfolk Community Law Service (NCLS), a legal advice charity, but they can't represent you in court. I wish I knew about them earlier. They helped me prepare my paperwork and answered any questions I had. I don't know how I could have done it without them. Having someone who knew a bit about what was going on was useful, but it was still a horrible experience. Most people need this kind of support – someone who knows how the legal system works.

The conclusion was okay, but I wasn't very comfortable with it. It meant my ex had access to my daughter sooner than I thought was appropriate. The judge said they believed it had been a fair trial. But how could it have been a fair trial when my ex had a barrister, and I didn't? For people in my situation, access to legal aid and having court representation is so badly needed.

"If justice isn't accessed by everyone, it serves no one. It's important we all come together and highlight the importance of legal aid, and that the government must step up and invest in this public service."

David Powles | CEO of Norfolk Community Law Service

To find out more about the campaign visit: **tinyurl.com/2tt2sekt**

The Law Society

Our outreach

Our outreach work remains vital to ensuring our services are accessible throughout Norfolk, and in 2025/26 we were delighted to add many new partners to our location list.

Katie and Lizzie, our Outreach Officers, work with grassroots organisations throughout Norfolk to spread awareness of what we do, as well as hold regular drop-in sessions where people can be referred to the right team within NCLS.

During the last year the number of locations we now hold drop-in sessions at has risen to more than 40, and they cover every corner of the county.

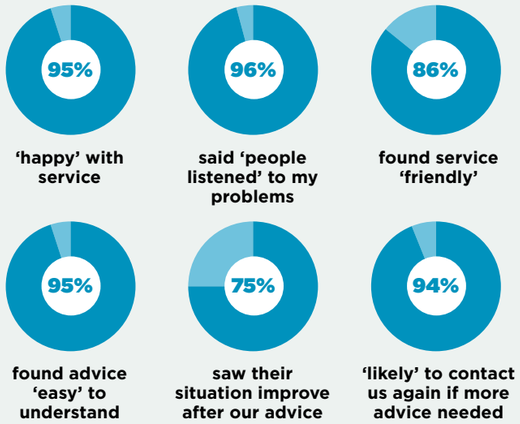
Thanks in part to their work, we have seen large increases in the number of people we help outside of Norwich, in particular in West Norfolk.

Our Outreach Officers work hard to ensure people in the most remote parts of Norfolk, where poverty can sometimes be high and rural isolation a real issue, can access our services when and how they need them.

We are always looking for new partners. If you are interested contact Katie or Lizzie on outreach@ncls.co.uk. Visit ncls.co.uk for our up to date outreach venue list.

Client satisfaction survey

We surveyed more than 500 people in 2025/26 about their experience with NCLS.



Our services

Domestic abuse

NCLS supports an increasing number of people of all ages who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Our solicitors can give advice on injunctions such as non-molestation and occupation orders and can signpost clients to legal aid solicitors if appropriate.

We work closely with NIDAS, which provides dedicated support for people experiencing domestic abuse in Norfolk.

Impact

- **34%** of all our family FLA sessions **involve domestic abuse**
- **92%** of domestic abuse clients **are women**
- **69%** of domestic abuse clients **have dependent children**
- **100%** of domestic abuse clients **found our service caring**

Family

Our Family Court Support Service assists separated parents who are in dispute about contact with their children. People are often referred to this service after making an initial FLA enquiry. Our experienced family solicitors can provide advice and can help with completing court forms and documents. We also provide 'McKenzie Friend' volunteers who accompany clients to their hearings and support them at court.

Impact

- **Supported clients at 356 family court hearings – a 46% increase since 23/24**
- **71%** of Family Court Support Service clients **were women**
- **55%** of Family Court Support cases were **domestic abuse related**
- **90%** of family clients said **we made it easy to understand the advice given**
- **100%** of family clients **'happy' with service**
- **90%** of family clients said **their situation improved after our help**

Free Legal Advice

Our Free Legal Advice (FLA) service is powered by around 85 volunteer solicitors and barristers who generously give up their time for free to provide initial independent legal advice.

This service covers a wide range of areas including general (civil) law, employment, housing and family matters. In 2025/26 we saw an increase in people coming to us for issues around employment, housing and wills and probate.

Impact

- **1,806** cases **advised on** in 2025/26
- **49%** of cases **family-related**
- **19%** of cases **employment-related**
- **65%** of clients **were female**
- **95%** of FLA clients said they were **happy with the service received**
- **97%** of FLA clients said **we made it easy to understand the advice given**

What our client said:

"I was feeling really overwhelmed and upset with my situation and I am so grateful for this service as I am now moving forward fully informed.

Joanne's Story

"I had been fighting an unfair dismissal case since 2019. It has been all consuming, affecting my mental and physical health and costing me friends along the way.

I have been driven to the point where my children feared for my sanity. It became obsessive, because I knew I had done nothing wrong. But NCLS gave me my voice and the confidence to keep going and eventually I was proven right. After losing my job unfairly, I was initially represented by a local solicitor, but that didn't work out and so I started to pursue the case on my own, battling through the pandemic with no means of income and the stress building up. Then, just when I had lost all my income and started to give up, somebody recommended NCLS and I was put in contact with a volunteer solicitor. Armed with incontrovertible material evidence the tide turned and the Respondent could no longer hide the facts. I finally settled through judicial mediation rather than endure the further stress of the proposed four-day hearing. We reached a six-figure financial settlement which reflected the years of anguish to which I had been subjected. Just as importantly, the non-financial aspects of the settlement acknowledged the hurt and distress I had experienced. I had allies, but NCLS was the most important ally because it was a constant support and I was always taken seriously and somebody was always taking the time to see how they could help and that really mattered."

"Timely and clear guidance can change someone's situation, confidence, and future. Contributing my time and expertise pro bono allows me to support individuals who might otherwise struggle to navigate complex legal issues alone. It matters to me to help build a community where everyone can understand their options and make informed decisions.

Ella Blake, HCR LAW | FLA Solicitor

Partnerships

NCLS is proud to enjoy a wide range of partnerships with multiple organisations, from law firms to fellow charities, marketing experts to foodbanks. In the past two years we have seen a big increase in the number of people we support in the West Norfolk and King's Lynn area and a lot of that has been due to the number of partnerships we have developed in the borough. One of these is the Hanseatic Union. We first begin working with the Lynn-based charity three years ago to help provide immigration advice to their clients through monthly drop-ins which they arrange. We now hold regular outreach sessions in partnership with the charity, enabling hard-to-reach clients to access all our wide-ranging services. Julie Chaplin, their CEO, said: "The staff members we have been provided with, to work on both immigration and general law-based enquiries, have been exemplary. Their absolute client focus is key to their successful outcomes."

HANSEATIC UNION

Our services cont.

Welfare Rights

We provide a free, confidential advice and advocacy service for clients who we believe have been wrongly denied their benefits and need help with an appeal and/or tribunal hearing.

Our team is Advice Quality Standard (AQS) quality-mark-accredited and has decades of experience in representing clients. In 2025/26 we successfully represented more people than ever at Tribunals.

Impact

- Over **£21m** secured for clients over past 7 years
- **£3.3m** of welfare benefits awarded and paid to clients in 2025/26
- **76%** success rate at appeal tribunal
- **167** people represented at tribunal hearings
- **89%** of welfare benefits clients said 'situation improved' after our support
- **97%** of people said we made it easy to understand the advice given

Immigration

Our highly qualified and experienced Immigration Team can offer help and advice in a wide range of areas regarding residency in the UK and help with Home Office applications. This includes, but is not limited to, family and human rights visas, settlement and citizenship and welfare benefit entitlement. Demand for the service remains high with clients, particularly families facing complex and ever-changing immigration requirements.

Impact

- **865** immigration clients in 2025/26
- **218** successful applications made for clients
- **89%** said we improved their situation
- **8%** of cases domestic-abuse-related
- **89%** said situation had improved after our advice
- **97%** found the service 'friendly'

Aileen

We first saw Aileen in 2024. She was homeless and living in a tent. She is European and had temporary permission to live in the UK. She was unable to access housing and benefits, and we intended to help her challenge this using caselaw. However, due to the stress of her situation she experienced a mental health crisis and was admitted to hospital under the mental health act. We supported Aileen again as she prepared to leave hospital. She still had no access to housing or benefits and Social Services had declined to assist. We challenged that decision and submitted an application to the Home Office for settlement. Her application was successful, enabling her to secure permanent housing. With a stable home and legal status, her mental health has significantly improved.

What our client said:

"I do want to take a moment to appreciate all your help and support throughout my visa application process. I also want to thank the entire team for their constant support, kindness, patience and dedication in assisting me. I am incredibly grateful for your generosity and professionalism.

Debt

Our advisers provide specialist support to help people regain control of their finances. Our advisers are approved intermediaries for Debt Relief Orders (DROs) and often we help those in the most serious levels of debt owed to multiple lenders. The average debt levels of those who come to us continues to rise alarmingly.

Average debt levels of clients

2019/20 – £4,429
2025/26 – £18,330

Impact

- We helped **552** debt clients in 2025/26
- **£2.3m** of debt written off or negotiated
- **Average client debt**
  Female **£20,136** • Male **£16,428**
- **Areas of highest debt**
  Mortgage arrears • Utility bills
  Council tax arrears • Benefit overpayments
- **79%** said situation had improved after our advice
- **79%** of debt clients said NCLS gave them increased confidence with money

Julie

Julie first contacted NCLS for help with her debts at the end of 2023. She's a single woman in her 30s, recently separated from her husband after experiencing years of domestic abuse. She has severe mental health problems and was very distressed by any contact from her creditors. She had approximately £9,000 of non-priority debt and didn't want to consider insolvency and damage her credit rating any further than it had been by the economic abuse she experienced. We contacted her creditors and asked them to hold recovery action while she waited for her divorce to be finalised and she knew what her long-term financial situation would look like. We gathered supporting medical evidence and asked her creditors to consider writing off the debts. To date, 8 of her 9 creditors have agreed to write off approximately £8,500 of debt. This has taken many months of chasing up responses and asking creditors to reconsider if they didn't initially agree to the request. Julie's anxiety about her debts reduces with every one that is written off.

Our solicitors

NCLS employs four solicitors to work across our teams and provide advice and guidance to clients with more complex legal problems.

Our **Social Welfare Solicitor** works across all the teams when required but particularly specialises in complicated immigration cases, often involving victims of domestic abuse.

Meanwhile, our **Family** Team employs three solicitors to help people with issues such as applying for domestic abuse injunctions, and advising and supporting clients to represent themselves in child arrangements cases.

We are also currently in the process of training a solicitor as part of the **Justice First Fellowship** (JFF) scheme, which is funded by the LEF Foundation with the aim of encouraging more people to become social justice lawyers.

How our solicitors' make a difference: **Emma's story**

Emma phoned NCLS saying that she had taken her young baby and two-year-old for their first overnight stay with their father, but five days later the father was refusing to return the two-year-old. The father has a serious criminal history, including domestic abuse towards our client. The client was eligible for legal aid but we were aware that none of the local providers were accepting clients at that time.

Our solicitor called Emma and advised her to make an urgent family court application, without notice to the father, asking them to order the return of the child. We helped her over the phone to complete the fee exemption and the application, asking for a hearing within 48 hours as the child was so young and had been kept away from his mum for nearly a week by that point. The judge ordered that the child should be returned immediately to Emma's care and recommended that she seek help from the police to protect her whilst she went to serve the order on the father and collect the child. Unfortunately, the police did not agree to attend, but the client went to her ex's property, showed him the order and he allowed her to bring the child home. The initial crisis averted, we signposted Emma to local legal aid providers and a few weeks later, one of them agreed to take her case. They will assist her at the upcoming hearings which will consider the risks and determine what contact (if any) the father has with the children going forward.

What our client said:

> I felt like my advisor was always there when we needed her. They were helpful and would make it very easy to understand everything.

Wellbeing improvements following legal advice

There is an ever growing amount of evidence that free legal advice has significant impact on people's lives, far beyond the specific legal issue. For instance, if we help to overturn a decision where someone has been wrongly denied benefits, they are more likely to have the money to afford the essentials in life, to seek meaningful employment, engage in the community and less likely to suffer mental or physical problems, commit crime or end up homeless. Higher wellbeing is also connected with reducing smoking and alcohol use. This helps keep them out of hospital and reduce their need for support from other statutory services. Research has shown the importance of social welfare law in tackling inequalities and preventing both mental and physical health issues from arising.

In 2024/25 this was covered in an essay published jointly by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and Professor Dame Hazel Genn, University College London, titled Health and Justice: A Fundamental Connection. They wrote: "A vast range of social welfare law provision prescribes protective rights and entitlements to shield people facing challenging circumstances from precisely the sorts of factors known to harm health and well-being."

NCLS has worked increasingly hard in the past two years to highlight the benefits of our advice on people's well-being through a series of questions asked after someone has received our support.

Here are the results:

Asked to rate how much their legal issue is adversely impacting their mental health, with 1 being a lot and 10 not at all, overall clients saw an **improvement of 14% after receiving our advice**.

After receiving our advice...

Domestic abuse clients saw a **26% improvement** in anxiety levels

Free Legal Advice clients saw a **9% improvement** in anxiety levels

Debt clients saw a **15% improvement** in life satisfaction levels

Welfare Benefits clients saw a **9% improvement** in anxiety levels

Family Court Support Service clients saw an **8% improvement** in their overall mental health

Immigration clients saw a **6% improvement** in life satisfaction levels

After advice question

Where 1 = no difference and 10 = a lot, how much do you feel the advice provided by NCLS has improved your mental health and wellbeing?

Service	Average score
Debt	7
Domestic Abuse	6
Family Court Support	8
Free Legal Advice	6
Immigration	7
Welfare Benefit Appeals	8

A wonderful year celebrating 40 years of NCLS

NCLS marked its 40th anniversary with a year of celebration, reflection and renewed commitment to ensuring access to justice for people across Norfolk.

The milestone year brought together supporters, staff, volunteers, funders and partners to recognise four decades of free legal advice and advocacy for local communities. Central to the celebrations was a special **80s-themed Anniversary Gala**, which highlighted the charity's achievements and the thousands of people helped through the years.

The charity also hosted a **Garden Party at the Bishop's House and Gardens** in Norwich, bringing together community leaders, supporters and long-standing partners in recognition of the role collaboration has played in the organisation's success since it was founded in 1985.

Another key moment came with the **official opening of the charity's new offices**, reflecting the growth of the organisation and its ambition to reach even more people in need of legal advice across the county. The new premises provide improved facilities for staff, volunteers and clients alike.

The anniversary year concluded with two prestigious events. **Lady Hale spoke at our Annual Law Lecture**. Interviewed by our patron, Shami Chakrabarti, she talked about her new book, access to justice and the importance of community-based legal support services. Meanwhile, the **Lord Mayor of Norwich, Paul Kendrick** and **The Sheriff, Stuart Wright** hosted around 50 people at a City Hall Civic Reception.

185 volunteers

87 solicitors

46 students

39 community volunteers

13 trustees

I have been volunteering for around 6 years with the team here. I joined NCLS as a volunteer because it was something I was passionate about, and work that is done by staff and volunteers is invaluable. The Team here provides excellent free legal and debt advice to members of the community that need the help the most.

Ejiro Okotete | Community volunteer

Our volunteers

Our team of dedicated volunteers play a vital role in the work NCLS does to support others. We have a wide range of volunteer opportunities available, which includes the following:

- **Pro-bono solicitors** who offer a wide range of free advice
- **McKenzie Friends** who provide support and guidance in the family courts
- **UEA students** who spend time with us as part of their law degree
- **Community volunteers** who conduct a wide range of important tasks

If you are interested in getting involved contact Volunteer Co-ordinator Niahl Hubbard at **niahl@ncls.co.uk**

I chose to volunteer with Norfolk Community Law Service because access to specialist legal advice shouldn't depend on someone's financial circumstances. Being able to offer free, expert support to people who may not otherwise have access to it is a meaningful way to give back to the community.

Alice Smith | Solicitor volunteer

Total 10,125 volunteer hours

1,031 free legal hours provided by solicitors – **value £257,750***

9,094 student/ community volunteer hours – **value £167,784***

*Based on an average of £250 an hour – Solicitors' guideline hourly rates – www.gov.uk

*Based on a value of £18.45 per hour of a comparable paid admin position.

Total social value of all volunteers

£425,534

Our partners and supporters

A massive thank you to the following funders and partners:

Norfolk law firms that help NCLS support clients in need:

Ashtons Legal	Ellisons Solicitors	Haywards	Mills & Reeve	Scott Moncrieff & Associates
BBL Family Law	Family Law Consultancy	Hodge Jones & Allen	New Square Chambers	Spire Solicitors
Birketts	FM Family Law	Kenneth Bush	Octagon Legal	Stenfield
Butcher Andrews	Fosters	Lawsonline.co.uk	LawWorks	UEA Law Clinic
Clapham & Collinge	Hansells	Leathes Prior	Rogers & Norton	
Cozens-Hardy	Hatch Brenner	Longe & Co	Rudlings	

Interested in becoming a supporter of NCLS? Contact Sarah Clack at **sarah@ncls.co.uk**

Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN)

Ben Scarlett
Director of NCAN

NCAN is a collaboration of independent accredited specialist social welfare advice agencies working in Norfolk. NCLS is the lead agency and hosts the core team within our workplace.

NCAN manages an online referral system that supports a 'No Wrong Door' approach, ensuring people can quickly access the right advice and representation. **Following over three years of development, an enhanced version 2 was launched this year, providing improved functionality for partners and the wider advice sector.** The referral system has also been recognised as a case study in guidance from the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government. NCAN also campaigns on issues affecting the advice sector, with a mission to end inequality by ensuring everyone in Norfolk can access timely, high-quality advice. Its Steering Group includes Age UK Norfolk, Age UK Norwich, The Bridge Plus+, Citizens Advice Norfolk, Citizens Advice Diss, Thetford & District, Equal Lives, Mancroft Advice Project and Shelter.

Anti-Poverty Alliance

The Norfolk Anti-Poverty Alliance brings together organisations, public bodies and people with lived experience to tackle the root causes of poverty in Norfolk. Launched in 2024 as a continuation of NCAN's cost-of-living response, the Alliance works to influence policy, improve services and raise awareness.

25/26 Alliance Highlights:

- **Helped shape Norfolk's crisis support services by mapping provision and identifying capacity gaps.**
- **Met with Norwich MPs to discuss proposed PIP reforms and the Timms Review.**
- **Presented research on furniture poverty to housing leaders.**
- **Worked with Norwich Foodbank's lived experience panel to inform priorities and future action.**

Focuses for the Alliance in 26/27:

- **Increase public awareness of poverty through campaigns, events and lived experience stories.**
- **Support local policy change by working with councils and partners to improve anti-poverty strategies and services.**
- **Influence national policy by strengthening local support for anti-poverty campaigns and amplifying lived experience voices.**

Referral system

Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) is a network of advice organisations delivering social welfare support across Norfolk. Since launching in 2013, its web-based referral system has facilitated **over 30,000** referrals between cross-sector partners covering areas including welfare benefits, debt, housing and mental health.

The system provides a joined-up 'no wrong door' approach, replacing ineffective signposting with seamless referrals. Professionals benefit from secure document sharing, referral tracking, reduced duplication of triage, and improved partnership working across **more than 100 advice organisations**.

The NCAN referral system currently supports **343 active teams** and organisations, with **3,069 registered users**, including **1,103 active users** who have logged in and made a referral within the last six months.

Referrals by issue 25/26

Referral Issue	Issue Count	% of issues	% of referrals
Debt	949	16.40%	24.74%
Welfare Benefits	865	14.94%	22.55%
Housing	668	11.54%	17.41%
Mental health	571	9.87%	14.89%
Money Management	394	6.81%	10.27%

The NCAN referral system is a web-based system that has facilitated over 30,000 referrals between cross-sector partners, in areas such as welfare benefits, debt, housing and mental health. The system ensures that there is a joined-up 'no wrong door' approach to advice and support in Norfolk, gradually moving away from the process of 'signposting' which doesn't always work for clients.

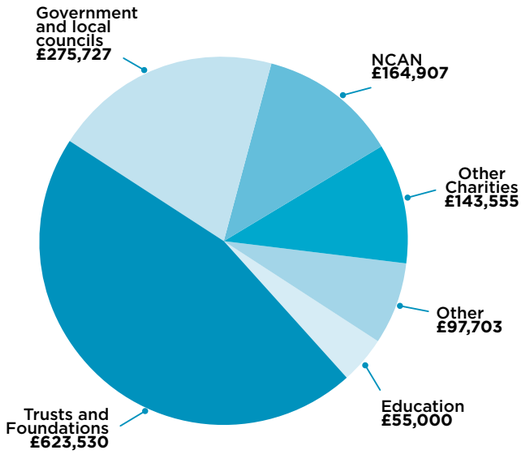
DWP Crisis and Resilience Guidance for Local Authorities (2026-2029)

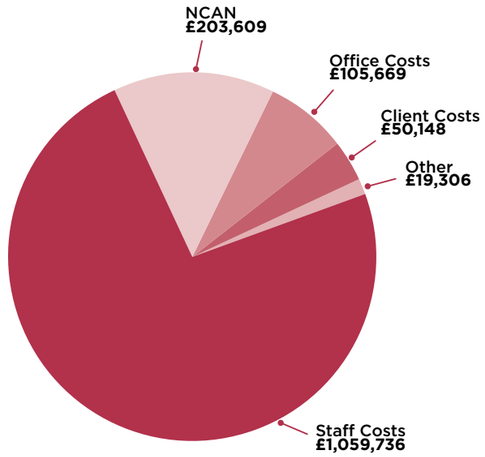
Financial overview

2025-26 was a challenging year for both NCLS Advice Services and NCAN. Income remained consistent, but costs rose by around 5% overall compared to the previous financial year. Income continued to be from a range of funders, with trusts and foundations remaining the largest source, accounting for 46% of total income.

Income £1,360,422

Trusts and foundations	£623,530	45.8%
Government and local councils	£275,727	20.3%
NCAN	£164,907	12.1%
Other Charities	£143,555	10.6%
Other	£97,703	7.2%
Education	£55,000	4.0%
Total	**£1,360,422**	





Expenditure £1,438,468

Staff costs	£1,059,736	73.7%
NCAN	£203,609	14.2%
Office costs	£105,669	7.3%
Client costs	£50,148	3.5%
Other	£19,306	1.3%
Total	**£1,438,468**	

Staff costs were the biggest increase with two funded posts added to NCLS core advice services during the period. Just over £50k of additional staff costs were due to a small cost of living salary increase given to staff and the huge increase in employers NI liability from April 2025.

NCAN funding dropped during 2025-26 resulting in a deficit at the year end of almost £40k. This was budgeted at the start of the financial year with sufficient reserves in place to cover the deficit. Reserves remain strong and work has begun on a longer-term funding plan.

Reserves held at the year end were as follows:

NCLS Advice Services – £278,077 – 2.8 months of budgeted expenditure.

NCAN – £225,499 – 18.9 months of budgeted expenditure.

* NCLS revenue reserves are slightly below the reserves requirement minimum of 3 months. This was agreed by the trustees during the year to enable essential modification work to be completed to the new premises – making it more accessible for clients. A plan has been agreed for the reserves to return to 3 months minimum during 2026/27.

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A proud history...

Norfolk Community Law Service has been providing free legal advice to the people of this county for more than 40 years and the need for our services is stronger than ever. We remain thankful to our founders and all those many thousands of people who have been part of our journey over the past four decades.

If you wish to donate to support our efforts please visit our website **ncls.co.uk**, scan the QR code opposite or email our Director of Operations Sarah Clack at **sarah@ncls.co.uk**

Get in touch with us

01603 496623

Immigration advice	Option 1	**immigration@ncls.co.uk**
Debt advice	Option 2	**debt@ncls.co.uk**
Domestic abuse	Option 3	**family@ncls.co.uk**
Family	Option 3	**family@ncls.co.uk**
Welfare benefits advice	Option 4	**wrars@ncls.co.uk**
Free Legal Advice	Option 5	**info@ncls.co.uk**

(For advice about discrimination and employment issues, as well as general advice, contact the Free Legal Advice service (option 5)

NORFOLK COMMUNITY LAW SERVICE

Changing lives - **Asserting rights** - **Eliminating inequality**

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