

Coping with the cost-of-living crisis

Citizens Advice Mendip are reporting record numbers of people turning to them for advice and emergency support as a result of the rise in the cost of living crisis. To help more people get the advice they need when they want it, Citizens Advice is opening up 'self-service' kiosks where you can contact an adviser or access information yourself on the website.

As part of a rolling programme, the first three of these kiosks have been set up at the Portway Annexe in Wells, the Crispin Centre in Street and Glastonbury Library – open Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm. Feedback has shown that people like the anonymity and ability to access information at a time that suits them.

Ian Byworth, CEO of Citizens Advice Mendip, comments: 'With increasing numbers of people struggling with the cost of living, we're opening up these advice kiosks to provide greater and easier access to our advice services. It's important for people faced with rising costs to know that there are ways we can help'. Here are Ian's top tips for dealing with the current situation:

- *Are you getting all the support you're eligible for?* It's worth finding out whether you are getting the right benefits and support with living costs. Even if you are in work, you may still be eligible for Universal Credit (in Mendip 40% of people claiming it are in employment). Citizens Advice main website (www.citizensadvice.org.uk) has a benefits calculator and advice on how to increase your income and reduce living costs.
- *Check your incoming and outgoing money:* if you're finding it hard to stay on top of your bills, it's a good idea to check what money you've got coming in and going out each month. Citizens Advice have an online budgeting tool that can help with this: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting/budgeting/work-out-your-budget/
- *Energy Bills Support Scheme:* until March this year, you will continue to get £66 a month off your electricity bill. This will be applied automatically by your energy company, and you won't have to repay it. If you have a pre-payment meter you'll get the discount via vouchers in the post or by email, or through an automatic credit when you top up at your usual top-up point. If you have a smart pre-payment meter, the credit will automatically be added to your meter.
- *Dealing with an emergency – need food or unable to top up your prepayment meter?* If you can't afford the food you need or the gas/electricity, Citizens Advice Mendip may be able to provide some support, depending on your circumstances.

You can access free, independent and confidential advice from Citizens Advice Mendip by visiting their website www.citizensadvicemendip.org.uk