

## Appendix 9 Commissioners visit to Ealing Advice Service

Date: Tuesday 17 August 2021

Venue: Lido Centre, Mattock Lane

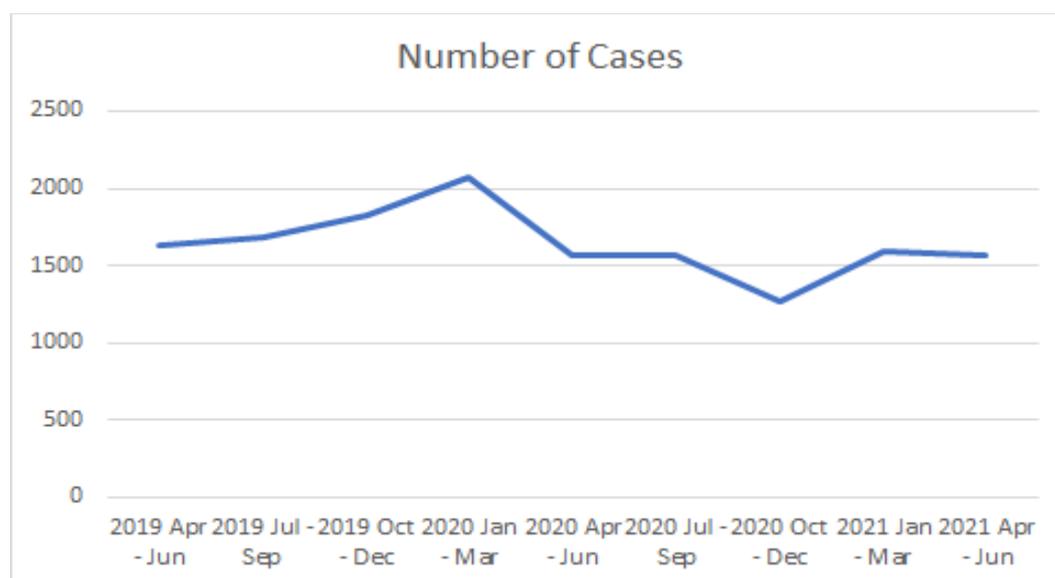
Participants: Matthew Coulam, Service Development Manager - Ealing Advice Service (EAS) consortium

Commissioners: Laura Forrester, Nicky Flash

### Ealing Advice Service (EAS)

EAS is a one-stop-shop advice service available to all residents of Ealing. These include deaf people who use BSL, people who cannot read or write, people facing language barriers, elderly and disabled people who are restricted to their homes.

Pre-COVID they provided advice to approx. 6000 people annually – mainly older people, people with mental health issues, health conditions and disabilities. [From 1/4/2019 - 31/3/2020, 7221 cases and 5720 clients]



### ***The number of cases opened by EAS in each quarter from April 19 to June 21.***

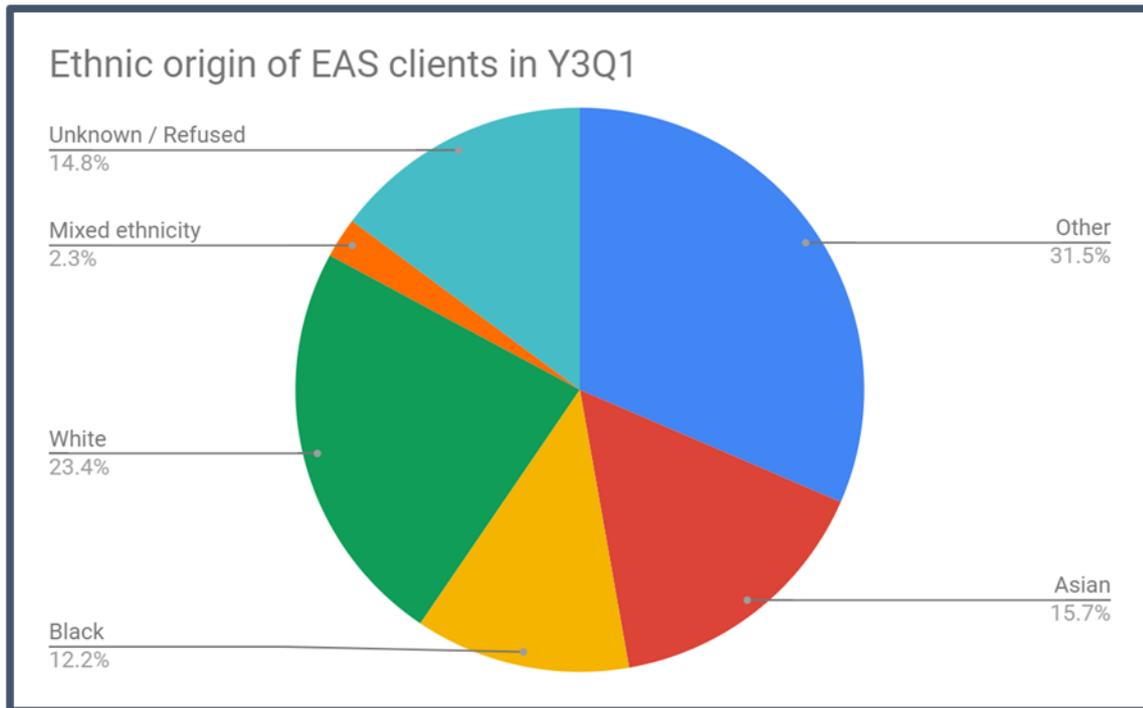
EAS is a consortium of nine delivery partners; DeafPlus, Ealing Advice Forum, Age UK Ealing, Ealing Mencap, Family Action, Havelock Family Centre, HFEH Mind, Nucleus Legal Advice Centre, Parents of Ealing Self-Help Training Scheme (PESTS) who use a shared database and two supporting partners; Contact for families with disabled children and Ealing Centre of Independent Living (ECIL). It is funded

by City Bridge Trust, Ealing Council, Mayor of London, NHS Ealing Clinical Commissioning Group and Pathways.

During COVID-19 the numbers using EAS dropped to around 4500, but this is steadily increasing. In 2020/2021 there were 5994 cases and 4557 clients. During lockdown the needs shifted, mainly food bank vouchers, consumer and employment. There were also greater numbers of younger people without additional needs. Currently the bulk of the work is around benefits (PIP, AA, UC, ESA), housing (disrepair, Locata), immigration, travel concessions, debt; and there are greater numbers of people with mental health issues.

EAS is currently delivering online, telephone advice and pre-arranged appointments only. Very occasional home visits in exceptional circumstances. EAS hopes to reintroduce drop-in sessions when it is safe to do so, both from their new hub at the Lido Centre, Mattock Lane, and other satellite sites across the borough; the Carers Centre, Greenford Community Centre and Havelock Family Centre.

EAS support many vulnerable people, some unable, for various reasons, to access council, or other statutory services directly. One of these reasons is a person's main/only language. Although EAS does not routinely collect data about languages, staff observations coupled with the Nationality and Ethnicity data have indicated an increased need for language support for Arabic, Farsi, Pashto & Dari speakers whose numbers grew during the COVID outbreak and currently make up 25%-30% of clients. This is in addition to an ongoing need for Polish, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and Somali speakers who were, and continue to, access the services.



***A snapshot of the ethnic origin of EAS clients in Y3Q1 is shown here in broad categories***

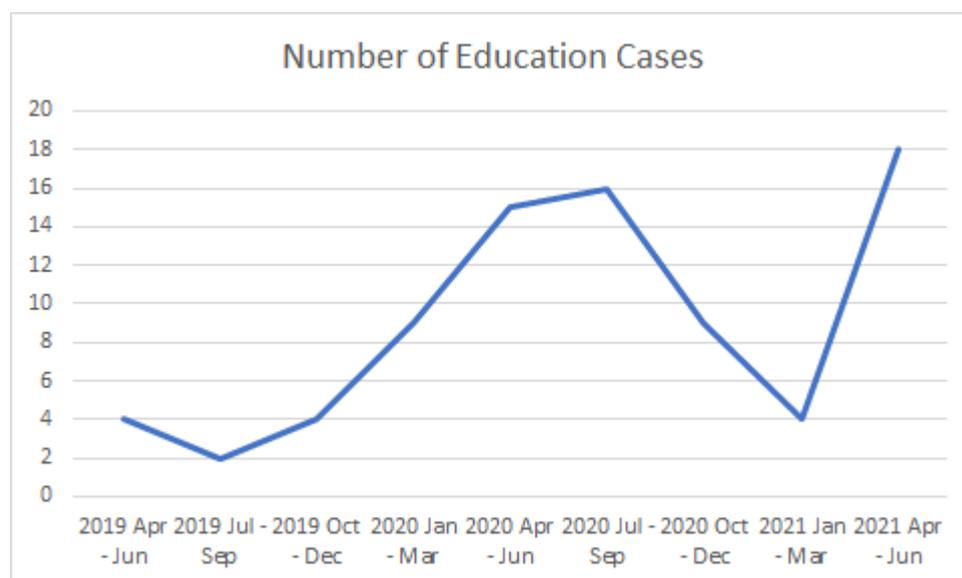
These broad ethnic categories mask the range of nationalities that access their services, with 'Other' including people from Middle Eastern countries and Afghanistan. Pre-covid there were clients from approximately 60 countries across the world; more recently there were fewer (49) countries but of these a further 9 nationalities were also represented: Armenian, Chinese, Kenyan, Kuwaiti, Senegalese, Sierra Leonean, Slovenian, Thai, Venezuelan.

Clients are screened, assessed and triaged; professionals can make an online referral. In the most recent quarter (Y3Q1) EAS reported that there were more situations when multiple cases for different matters were opened for the same client (eg. a client presenting with separate housing, benefits and travel concession inquiries). This could suggest that, following lockdown, inquiries are becoming more complex due to the knock-on effect of certain issues over time. Alternatively, it could be due to the simultaneous relaxation of restrictions to debt enforcement, benefit assessments and housing matters.

## Links to the Ealing Race Equality Commission Themes

### Education and Learning

The types of cases that are classed in this category include parents finding it difficult to access a school service, unable to navigate the school application process, struggling with a child exclusion etc. From 2019/2020 there were 19 and from 2020/2021 this increased to 44 of which 13 related to adult education.



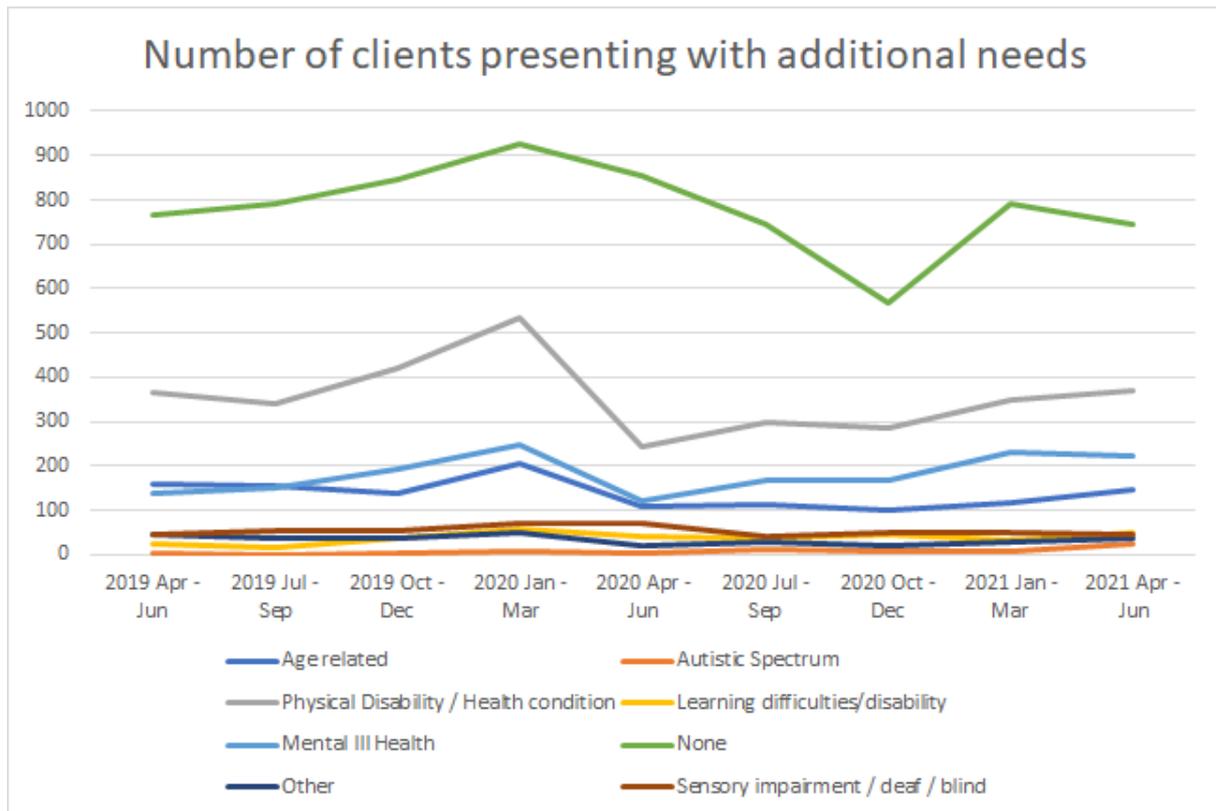
*What do you need from the council?*

Clear and practical advice on accessing school places available for parents that cannot navigate digital platforms and do not speak English as their first language. Opportunities presented by schools for parents to engage with their Senior Leadership Teams to understand the school exclusion process and learn about internal and external options to support the education of their child.

### Health and Housing

The number of clients with mental health issues who approached EAS during the COVID outbreak initially dropped when lockdown occurred but has steadily increased to exceed pre-COVID numbers. [2019/2020 651 (10.2%), compared to 2020/2021 561 (10.9%)]. This

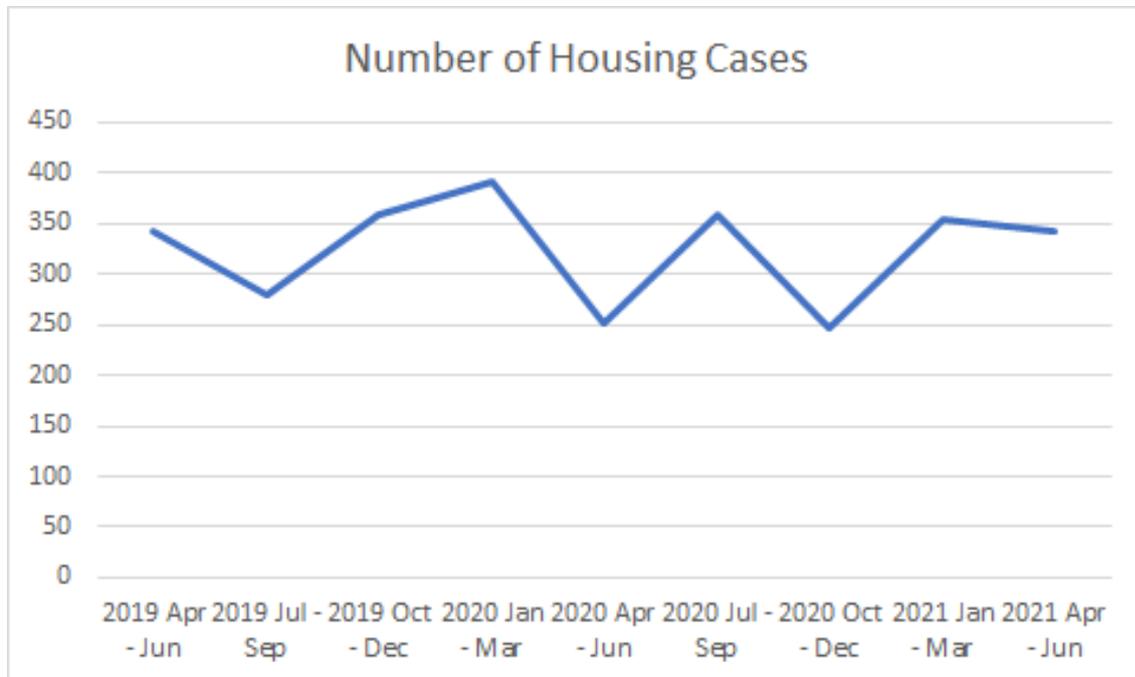
fluctuation skews the data when comparing annual figures. When comparing quarterly figures for example in Apr-Jun 2019 Pre-COVID there were 140 clients with mental health issues accessing EAS during the quarter (9% of clients) compared to 222 in Apr-Jun 2021 (14% of clients) - a 58% increase. It is also worth noting the number of clients presenting with additional needs due to physical disability/health condition is also steadily increasing



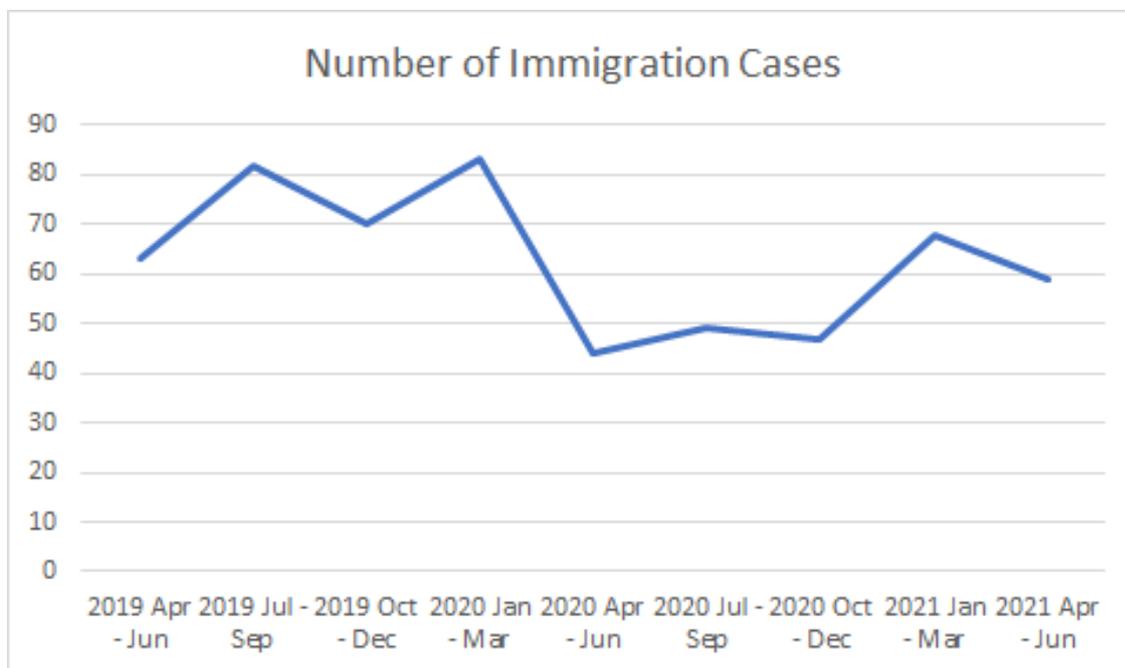
It is interesting to note that in Y3Q1 Health and Social Care made up 4.2% of EAS cases

Housing is particularly difficult to access if immigration status is unclear. EAS Y3Q1 figures show housing cases 333 (21.4%), immigration cases 3.9%. Immigration cases saw a decrease in asylum related enquiries, but an increase in EU citizens referred to settled status schemes. Enquiries decreased overall.

During lockdown, housing evictions and possession orders went down whereas access to social housing/Locata and homelessness went up. [From 1/4/2019 - 31/3/2020, 1372, from 1/4/2020 - 31/3/2021, 1211]



***No. of EAS housing cases between April 2019 to June 2021***



***No. of EAS immigration cases between April 2019 to June 2021***

EAS is currently running a GLA funded 6-month pilot, advising groups about how to access Locata, My Account, Council application, UC online journal etc.

*What do you need from the council?*

Review of issues with the aim of accessing social care, and other matters covered under the Care Act, more effective and efficient.

Provision for long term, regular outreach, as a way to prevent re-occurring resource-intensive financial crises (EAS cannot provide long term, regular outreach eg. a client needing regular home visits to manage correspondence)

Co-ordinated joined-up planning of advice services – for example Travel Concessions advice is funded by the City Bridge Fund providing Blue Badges, Freedom Passes, Parking Bays, Mobility aids etc for the next 2 years, legal social care advice is provided using Pathways funding and concerns have been noted, the EAS service is in place til March 2023. The process for planning for and provision of advice services for the borough from 2023 is due to commence autumn 2021.

Recognition of the importance, and support to ensure there is suitable provision of language support, for Arabic, Farsi, Pashto & Dari speakers in addition to an ongoing need for Polish, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and Somali speakers.

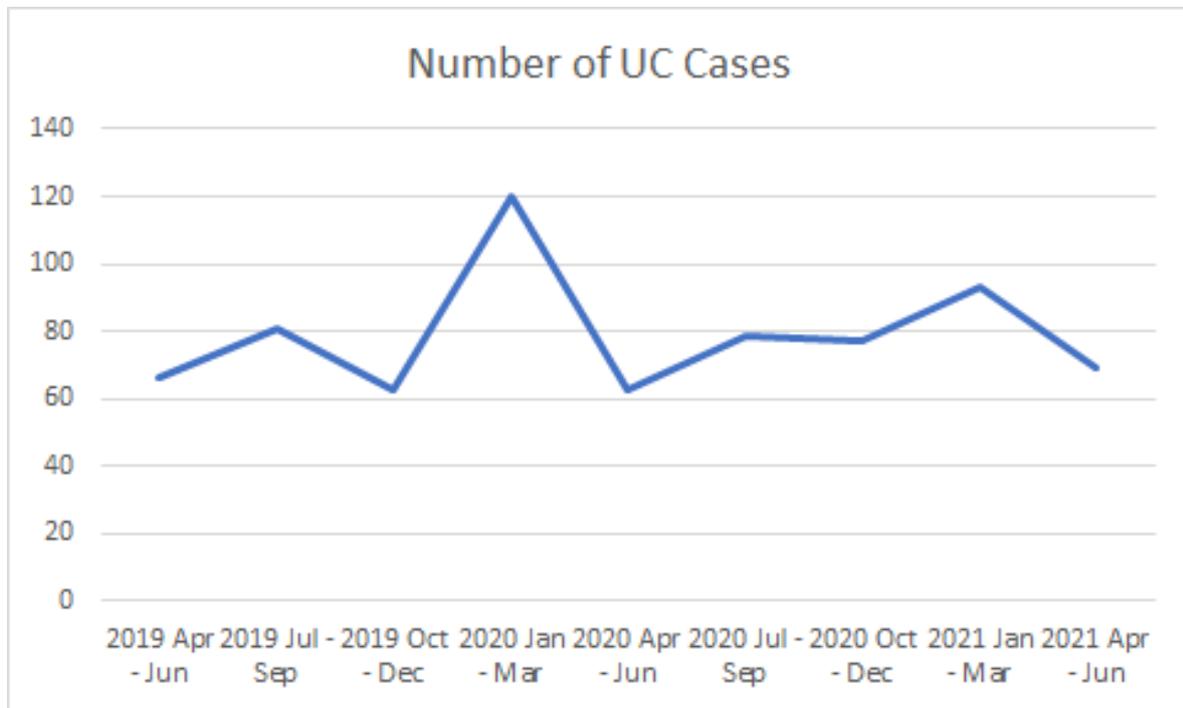
### **Income and Employment**

During 2020/2021 EAS recorded £2.1 million in financial outcomes for the borough's residents with £669,628 over the past 3 months. Helping vulnerable residents access support that they are entitled to is a major part of the work being done by EAS, in Y3Q1 Benefits work was 35.7% and debt was 6.9% of their cases.

Attendance Allowance & DLA both increased during 2020/2021 & PIP remained the same, Council Tax Support increased during 2020/2021

Universal Credit remained at the same level, but HB and ESA decreased (this is likely due to people transitioning from legacy benefits to UC).

Universal credit in 2019/2020 there were 329, in 2020/2021 there were 312 cases.

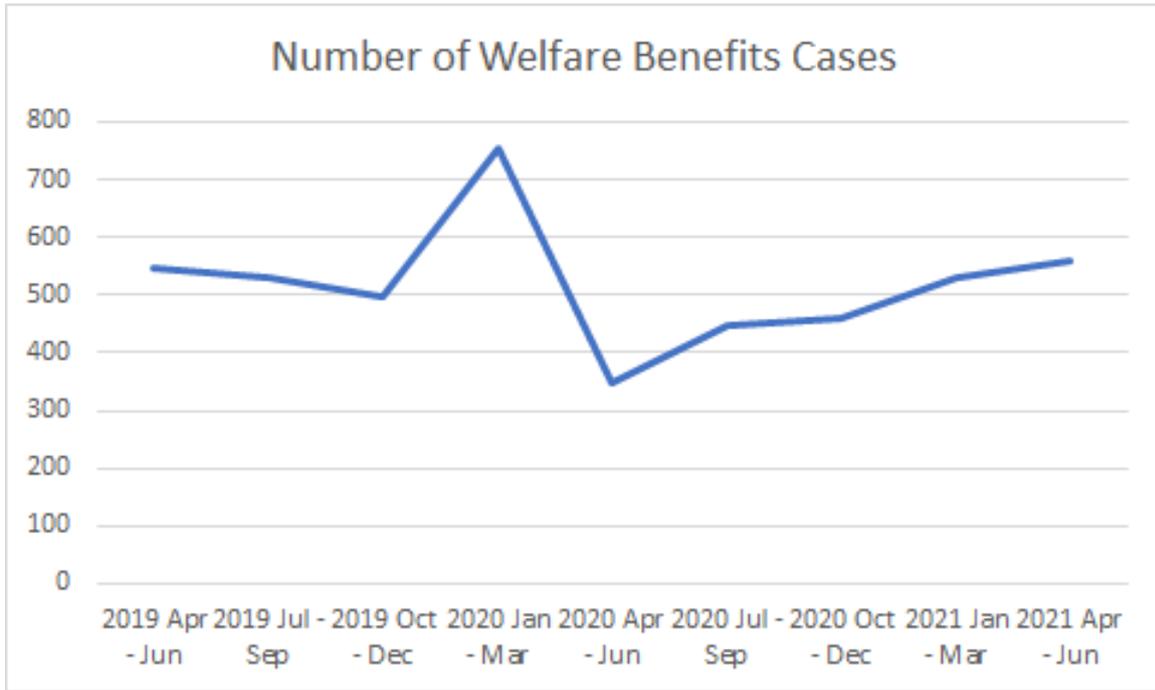


**No. of EAS Universal Credit cases between April 2019 and June 2021**

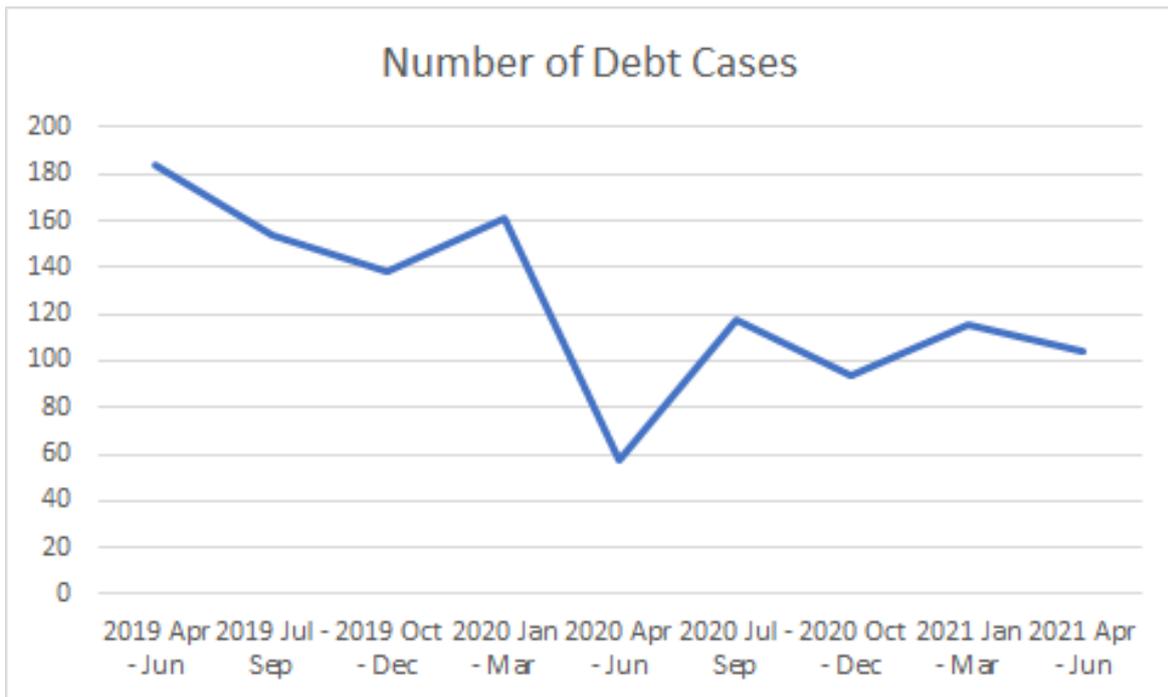
Local Welfare Assistance more than doubled, most other benefits decreased or remained at roughly the same levels

Welfare Benefits - saw an overall decrease in enquiries during COVID from 2331 to 1781.

Lockdown saw a sudden suspension of benefit reviews, assessments and renewals but the numbers are steadily increasing.



***No. of EAS welfare benefit cases between April 2019 and June 2021***



***No. of EAS debt cases between April 2019 and June 2021***

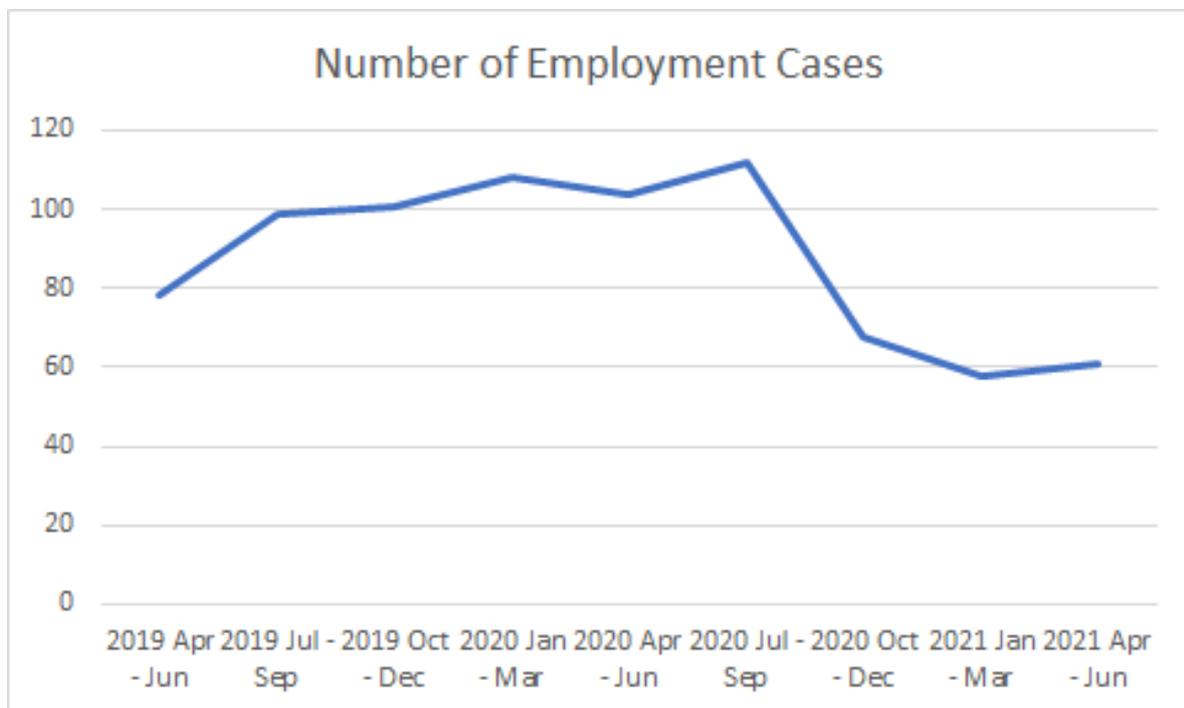
Debt - overall saw a significant decrease in enquiries, possibly due to suspension of enforcement

Employment – number of cases has significantly reduced over time. It is not known why, although it has been suggested that it could be due to very low rates of unemployment following Brexit?

Unfair dismissal from work in 2019/2020 - 96 dismissal, 33 redundancy & 19 tribunals, in 2020/2021 - 55 dismissal, 57 redundancy & 13 tribunals

Unemployment – seeking a job.

In 2019/2020 supported 12 applying for jobs & 1 unemployment scheme, in 2020/2021 supported 7 applying for jobs



**No. of EAS employment cases between April 2019 and June 2021**

*What do you need from the council?*

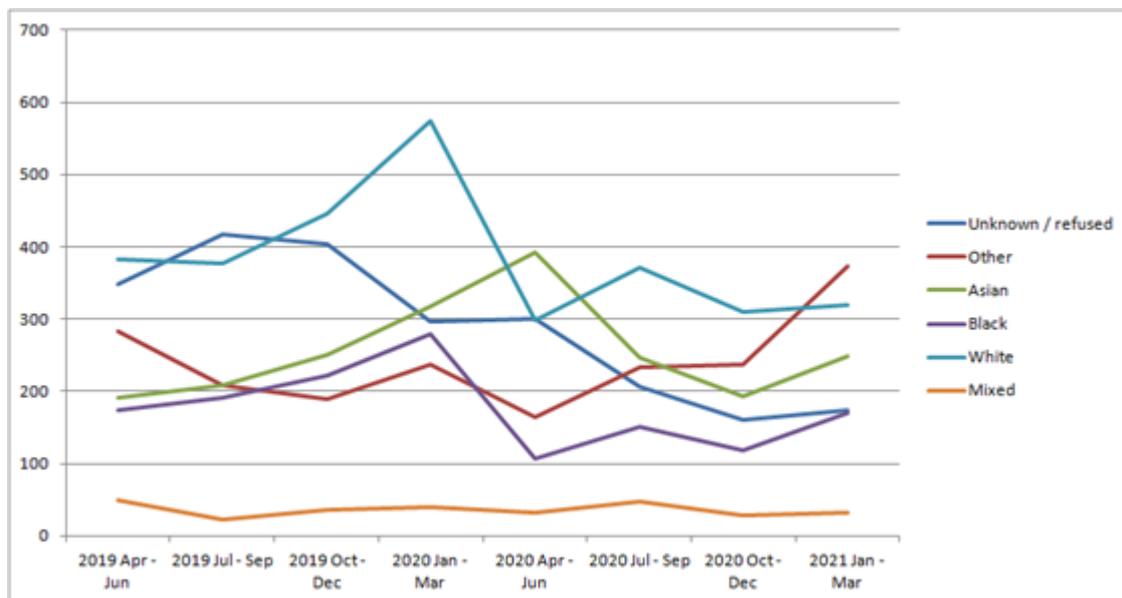
Celebration and recognition of the significant contribution the VCS sector, such as EAS are making to improve the lives of residents

More support to help with the increase in numbers and range of languages and cultures of people accessing advice services. The number of Arabic, Farsi, Pashto & Dari speaking residents accessing EAS increased during the pandemic - currently between 25% - 30% of clients. This is in addition to substantial numbers of people speaking Polish, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and Somali.

### Additional Information

#### Ethnicity and nationality

EAS gathers ethnicity data as required by the council's monitoring requirements. The headings have been simplified to show changes in the numbers approaching EAS below ('other' includes Middle Eastern countries and Afghanistan):



EAS also gather Nationality data but the number of entries recorded for this is far lower than ethnicity (3/4 of cases do not have a Nationality recorded). In addition, the wide range of options makes it difficult to compare data in the same way as ethnicity. However, the charts provided here give a snapshot of the recorded nationalities for 2 quarters (one pre-lockdown vs the most recent quarter). The number of different nationalities recorded had dropped from 61 in Jan/Mar 2020 to 49 in April/Jun 2021 of which 9 were new; Armenian, Chinese, Kenyan, Kuwaiti, Senegalese, Sierra Leonean, Slovenian, Thai, Venezuelan.