

Reviewed June 2023

Appointment Policy

As an advice charity, we try to do the best that we can to provide a high quality service to as many clients as we can. Our service is always in high demand and many people in Harlow need our help. An important part of our service is to advise clients by appointment. Sometimes this is not necessary, as clients may take away information and be able to help themselves.

However, some clients need an appointment to discuss their problem in detail. Our service is provided by both volunteers and staff who try to do the best that they can to help clients with their problems.

When clients miss appointments without giving us notice, it can have a serious impact on the service because that appointment slot is unfilled. This reduces the number of clients that we can see and prevents us from helping more people. For that reason, we have the following policy to deal with appointment problems.

If you are going to be late for your appointment

If you are going to be late please telephone 01279 770189 as soon as you can.

1 - 10 minutes late

Please let us know as soon as you can that you are going to be slightly late – we will try to keep your appointment open so that you are still seen by an adviser.

10 - 15 minutes late

If you arrive more than 10 minutes late it may be that the adviser cannot help you because we will have given your appointment to someone else. It will depend very much on the circumstances of that particular day.

15 - 45 minutes late

If you arrive more than 15 minutes late we will have assumed that you were not going to attend your appointment. Also, because other clients will be scheduled to be seen, it is unlikely that we will be able to advise you and you will need to return on another day.

If you cannot attend your appointment

- **If you are not able to attend your appointment, please telephone 01279 770189 as soon as you can. This will allow us to give your “slot” to someone else.**
- If it is your first cancelled appointment then we will try and give you another appointment as soon as possible.

If you miss ONE appointment

We understand that life can be complicated and that unforeseen circumstances do arise.

If you are going to miss a single appointment please let us know and we will try to reschedule another one as soon as we can.

- Please note that we are so busy that it could be several weeks before another appointment is available. This is one of the reasons that we advise all clients to attend their appointments, especially if their problem is urgent.

If you do not contact us to let us know that you are not going to attend, we will note this on our computer system and assume that you no longer need our help.

If you miss TWO OR MORE appointments

If you have already missed one appointment we hope that you will make every effort to attend a second appointment. If you fail to attend your second appointment, then we will assume that you no longer need our help.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, if you subsequently contact us, it is unlikely that we will be able to offer you another appointment. You would need to access our Adviceline service again (0808 278 7856). Alternatively, you might find it more convenient to seek advice from another organisation.

If you miss THREE OR MORE appointments, or continually refuse our advice

If you consistently fail to attend our appointments, or if you continually ignore the advice that we have given, then we may exclude you from our service. This will only be done in the most serious of circumstances and we will always notify you in writing if we intend to do this.

If Citizens Advice Harlow needs to reschedule your appointment

Whilst we make every effort to ensure that you are seen when your appointment is scheduled, there *are* occasions when we may need to reschedule your appointment because a volunteer or member of staff is ill, or due to circumstances beyond our control.

If we need to reschedule your appointment we undertake to:

- Contact you as soon as we become aware of the problem. We will always try to telephone you to let you know that there is a problem. This is why it is so important to leave us a telephone number or an alternative way of getting a message to you.
- If we cannot reach you by telephone, we will leave a voicemail explaining that there is a problem, with a request that you contact us on 01279 770189 to rearrange your appointment.
- If we haven't heard from you by the end of the day, and if there is enough notice, we will notify you in writing of the need to reschedule. However, in some instances this may not be possible, as the problem may have arisen at very short notice for example, if a volunteer has called in sick that morning.
- If we need to reschedule, we will try to offer you another appointment at the same location, or one elsewhere if urgency dictates that this is necessary.

We appreciate that your problem may be very urgent and that you may have nowhere else to turn to – for that reason we apologise for any inconvenience that rescheduling your appointment causes you.

Comments, suggestions and complaints

If you have any kind of feedback about our service or our appointments policy, we want to hear it. Sometimes you may be very happy with the service. Sometimes you may not be happy or you may be very unhappy with our service. However, unless you tell us, it is often difficult for us to know.

If you have any comments, suggestions or complaints, then **please** write to us. This allows us to consider your feedback in detail and we will respond to you in writing. We will always try to resolve the issue to your satisfaction if we can – if we are able to, we will try to change the aspect of the service that you are unhappy with, or try to find another solution for you.

If you have problems writing or communicating any feedback, please attend our walk-in service and we will arrange for someone to take details of your feedback for further action.