Annual Review 2026

HARC

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre











RELIEVING POVERTY

ADDRESSING INEQUALITY

IMPROVING WELLBEING

FIGHTING INJUSTICE



We are HARC

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

HARC is a registered charity providing Specialist Quality Mark accredited welfare benefit advice and representation to people of all ages in East Sussex and beyond.

With our **free** and **confidential service**, we aim to address inequalities, relieve poverty, and improve the quality of life for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

HARC's team of **specialist welfare benefit advisors** offer an end-to-end confidential and impartial support service covering all stages of application up to and including appeal tribunal. Responding to the needs of individuals and tailoring our service, we meet their requirements with face to face, telephone and remote support at a range of community venues and home visits.

HARC is strongly rooted in the community and plays an integral role in the local support network. This includes running two high street charity shops which provide valuable volunteering and work experience opportunities for local people.

It is our aim to help bring about a **welfare system which is fair**, accountable and recognises the issues of the individual. In doing so, we actively campaign toward positive policy change and provide specialist welfare benefits training to ensure everyone working with and for the most vulnerable in our society have the tools they need to provide the right support.



Jacky Everard
Chief Executive



Becky Polain
Advice Manager



Wendy Knowles
Development Manager



Teresa Andrews
Training & Outreach Manager



Mark Webb
Quality Manager & Specialist Advisor



Carina Brown
SQM Supervisor & Specialist Advisor



Claire Guy-Smith
Advice Supervisor & Specialist Advisor



Clive Edwards
Specialist Advisor



Eddie Angus
Specialist Advisor



Lorraine Guy
Specialist Advisor



Sarah Darker
Specialist Advisor



Andrea Brown
Welfare, Budgeting & Benefits Advisor



Mandy Browne
Welfare Benefits Advisor



Phoebe Relf
Welfare Benefits Advisor



Sarah Smithers
Welfare Benefits Advisor



Karen Pope
Finance Administrator



Astrid Gray
Senior Receptionist & Administrator



Natalie Ripley
Reception & Admin



Michael Gray
Reception, Admin & Data Apprentice



Abi Mann
Reception, Admin & Comms Apprentice



Jackie Workman
Charity Shop Manager



Steve Elledge
Charity Shop Manager



Adam Reade
Charity Shop Relief Manager



Ollie Harrison
Charity Retail Assistant Apprentice

Board of TRUSTEES

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Director

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Director

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Director

Gareth Delany,
Rother District Council Representative

Chair's Introduction



I reflect on the past year with real pride in what Hastings Advice and Representation Centre (HARC) continues to achieve. We are working in an increasingly challenging environment, where economic pressures, rising living costs and significant welfare reform affect the thousands of people who turn to us for support. As the benefits system grows more complex, access to high-quality, independent advice has never been more important.

Some of our key achievements this year include:

- Over **£5.8** million secured for our clients in the year to the end of March 2026.
- **19,319** client contacts handled over the same period.
- For every **£1** invested in delivering our services, we secured **£7.60** for local people in previously unclaimed, enhanced or reinstated benefits.

At the heart of HARC is an **exceptional team**, sharing a genuine commitment to fairness, compassion, and social justice. These values create a culture where people are supported to deliver excellent advice while growing professionally and personally. Our low staff turnover reflects a workplace where people feel valued and motivated, and it lets us retain the depth of knowledge that directly benefits our clients. This year we were delighted to welcome four new members of the HARC family - Eddie, Mandy, Abi and Ollie - who have each brought enthusiasm, fresh ideas and new skills to the organisation.

We also **launched our new website**, providing easier access to information, advice and support while showcasing the breadth of our work. I encourage everyone to visit and see how HARC continues to evolve.

This year we introduced our **new Trustee Recruitment Pack**, as part of our commitment to attracting diverse skills, experience and fresh perspectives to our Board. Effective governance underpins everything we do, ensuring HARC remains sustainable, accountable and ambitious for the future. **See page 12 to find out more**.

The following pages set out our achievements this past year and the challenges ahead, including a closer look at **what's next for HARC on page 13**. HARC has always been more than an advice service - it is a trusted community asset, helping people build resilience, protect their rights and create better futures. That purpose has never been more important than it is today.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, funders and partners. My sincere thanks go to every member of the HARC team for their professionalism, compassion and unwavering commitment throughout another demanding year. Together, you continue to show what can be achieved when people share a common purpose.

Cordelia Woollard,
Chair

Our year in numbers

HARC

In the year to 31st March 2026

A TOTAL OF

19,319

CLIENT CONTACTS

That equates to more than

74

client contacts each working day

1,402

client contacts were made with **vulnerable, elderly, disabled** or **isolated clients** at surgeries or home visits

654

clients were represented at review and tribunal

624

CASES WERE **WON**

THAT IS A

95.4%

SUCCESS **RATE**

88.1%

of clients who approached HARC received support – those we couldn't support were referred to more appropriate agencies

£5,818,662

was secured in previously unclaimed, enhanced or reinstated benefits and associated payments, of which

£5,448,645

was secured for clients with disabilities and long term health issues

IN COMPARISON IT COST JUST

£765,736

for HARC to provide an extensive range of advice and representation services comprising face to face advice, telephone and email advice, secondary advice to professional colleagues, outreach surgeries, home visits, complex caseloads, advocacy and tribunal work

For every £1 invested in HARC, **£7.60** was returned to East Sussex residents



Eddie
Specialist Advisor

I joined the HARC team in October 2025, and I have really enjoyed working in the area where I grew up.

Having spent my childhood in central St Leonards, I have seen first hand how the area has changed over the years, as well as the challenges many local people continue to face. Drawing on my experience in the Civil Service and my understanding of the benefits system, I have found it **incredibly rewarding** to support residents and give something back to the place that has always been home to me.

In the coming year, I look forward to meeting more people and collaborating with other charities in their efforts to **tackle poverty** and **improve opportunities** for residents across the St Leonards and Hastings area.

Eddie Angus,
Specialist Advisor

After the lady who previously helped with my PIP form retired, I didn't know where to turn - but HARC saved me. I'm a disabled woman with arthritis and clinical depression, and the staff were friendly and welcoming as soon as I stepped through the door.

Eddie guided me through the horrendous form and was a joy to meet. He made me feel comfortable and safe and didn't mind that I kept talking over him...sorry Ed!

I was scared my claim wouldn't be accepted, but Eddie said HARC would be with me every step of the way. A couple of weeks later, it was awarded and extended. I couldn't have done it without Eddie and HARC...thank you!

Leeanne (Client)

Mandy

Welfare Benefits Advisor

At the end of 2025 I was made redundant. I'd spent years working with vulnerable people, including 3 years as a homelessness support worker, but 8 years as a Team Manager had left me feeling disconnected from face-to-face client support.

By chance I saw an advert for a role at HARC. I'd worked alongside them before and knew the wonderful work they did. I was thrilled to get the job.

My role is varied, I work mainly with pension age but also some younger clients, helping people apply for charitable pensions, grants and Attendance Allowance.

Visiting clients at home is a privilege and it's a great chance to see how things are generally. Is other help needed? Are there any safety issues? Clients are more relaxed at home, making it easier to have difficult conversations.

I also work on the HARC helpline where every call is different, and I learn something new every day!

Working within the HARC team has been wonderful. I have had so much support in my time here, with colleagues who go above and beyond for clients. The team are a font of knowledge, and having had their support myself, I can vouch for it.

Mandy Browne,
Welfare Benefits Advisor



Back in early 2022 I banged my big toe in a silly accident at home. It turned gangrenous, and eventually my leg was amputated. I came home after four months in hospital to a life changed dramatically. I managed to get around in my wheelchair, but not much more. I needed constant support from my overworked wife. Tasks I'd once done in minutes now took real effort - standing on one leg to reach the top shelf, anyone? And that was just for one pot of honey.

Friends suggested Attendance Allowance. Sceptical, I downloaded the multi-page questionnaire and thought "how could I ever complete this?". I put it back in the drawer.

Then I was told to contact HARC and Mandy came into our lives. Her optimism won us over, and together we tackled the daunting quiz for the DWP.

A few weeks later I heard I was entitled to Attendance Allowance. Good news indeed.

Without HARC and Mandy, that questionnaire would have stayed in the drawer. Thank you HARC - thank you Mandy!

Nick (Client)



Abi

Reception, Admin & Comms Apprentice

From the moment that I started here I felt that I had found somewhere I belonged. HARC is full of amazing people, who all have such clear goals when it comes to helping our community. I grew up around the benefit system, and I know how challenging it can be to be a part of it. When I got the call to say I had been successful in my interview, I was thrilled to know that I would be starting an apprenticeship at HARC.

I was very eager to learn coming into this role, and in the few months I have been here, I cannot believe how much I have grown. I've gained confidence, developed new skills, and had the chance to work alongside **such supportive colleagues** who have helped me every step of the way. It's been great knowing that the work I do contributes to making a positive difference. I'm excited to keep learning, take on new challenges, and continue supporting the charity and the people we help.

After seeing how hard everybody works here, I have no doubt that this is an **extremely important part of our local community**. The help that HARC provides to clients is so incredibly thoughtful and I have every faith that every single member of our team is committed to making a **positive difference**.

Abi Mann,
Reception, Admin & Comms Apprentice



Ollie

Charity Retail Assistant Apprentice

I have enjoyed my time at HARC because it has helped me gain valuable work experience and improved my confidence. As soon as I joined HARC I finally felt part of a team that actually cared about my ideas and really listened to me. I applied for the role because I wanted to develop new skills in a professional environment and learn more about working with people. I have met lots of new people and learned about the different roles within the charity.

I have seen how hard everyone works here, and I am proud to help create social media posts to **promote this wonderful organisation and increase awareness** of the incredible service they provide.

The staff here are friendly, supportive, and always willing to help when I have questions. They have **encouraged me to become more independent** and have trusted me with different responsibilities. Through this experience, I have become more confident using social media for business purposes and communicating professionally. In the future, I would like to continue developing my confidence, improve my customer service and marketing skills and take on more responsibility. **I really enjoy it at HARC**.

Ollie Harrison,
Charity Retail Assistant Apprentice

HARC Client Journey



Step 1

First contact

(via reception desk, helpline, email, outreach, or referral).
Advice given.

RESOLVED

MORE HELP NEEDED?



Step 2

Further assessment of case

Including income maximisation and benefit check.

RESOLVED

MORE HELP NEEDED?



Step 3

Specialist Advisor

Specialist appointment conducted.

Benefit decision received

NO — AWARDED? — YES — RESOLVED



Step 4

Mandatory Reconsideration

HARC challenges the decision.

NO — DECISION OVERTURNED? — YES — RESOLVED



Step 5

Appeal & Tribunal

HARC represents the client.

HARC

Resolution

Matter followed through to resolution from any stage.
Arrears and ongoing payments due are paid to client.



Client Stories



Michelle

Lorraine has been helping me for years now. She has helped my whole family with so many different things, like DLA and Housing Benefit, and has helped us through some really difficult times.

My husband isn't much of a people person, but Lorraine has made us all **feel comfortable** when she comes to our house, he likes her and trusts her. It is nice to have someone actually listen to us and care about us. I will always call Lorraine if I ever need help with anything. She has been able to help us with stuff that we didn't even know we needed help with. She always **makes time for us**, and it doesn't matter how long we don't see her for, she is always there and ready to help us whenever we need her. Without Lorraine we would've lost everything. She is an amazing person, and I am **so grateful** for everything she has done for me.

Steve

I had never really been on benefits before and honestly, I felt a bit embarrassed. One of my mates recommended I call HARC, and I wasn't sure about it, but they have been so helpful. It always feels like someone is on my side when I am working with HARC.

Sarah knows me so well, it feels like she just understands. She has been amazing. She just knows exactly how to **put my mind at rest**. So do the others. It is nice to have someone there that can reassure you. They are trustworthy, helpful and **never make me feel like I'm overreacting**. The knowledge and the kindness that they all have is just amazing. They have helped to lift so much weight off my shoulders. I am **so grateful** for HARC.

"I've never forgotten how kind you all were. I just wanted to say thank you and let you know I think you're all fantastic.

HARC Client 2026

Martin

Sarah is amazing. The last 18 months she has been there for me through everything. The last 3 months have been a nightmare, and Sarah has seriously helped us no end. She has done loads to help me and my wife, Julie. I dread to think where we would be if it wasn't for her.

I had been promised help by so many different organisations, but **no one has helped me like HARC** has. There is nothing better than walking into that room and seeing her smiling face – it just makes everything feel better. She is the backbone of HARC in my eyes.



Sarah & Martin

Veronica

HARC is an 'OASIS' at the centre of Hastings, providing support and guidance to many in the surrounding community.

I believe that all agencies should be informed and connected to HARC so they can work together to provide support and encouragement to their clients.

The welcome and respect by the staff at HARC's reception should never be underestimated, especially at a time when people from all walks of life are at their most vulnerable, it genuinely is a **heart-warming experience**, and **nothing is rushed**.

My first HARC Advisor was Andrea. She provided exceptional information and signposting via their helpline service. I was then supported by Claire and Lorraine. Their level of **patience, understanding and guidance** provided to me felt deeply humbling particularly during a time of deep bereavement.

Their attention to detail in supporting you through the process was meticulous, continuously **affording the client their dignity** through much needed support.



> **I get a sense of pride in being part of such a fantastic organisation which really helps people.**
>
> **Shelley** HARC Trustee

Join Our Board

HARC is stepping into a new chapter of stability, growth and innovation. To get there, we're expanding our Board of Trustees - and we want to hear from people who share our commitment to fairness, dignity and social justice.

Trustees play a vital role in shaping HARC's future: setting strategic direction, safeguarding good governance, and making sure we keep providing high-quality advice to the people who need it most.

We're particularly keen to hear from people with knowledge or experience in:

- Personal/lived experience of claiming Welfare Benefits.
- Personal experience of living in poverty.
- Risk Management.
- Influence and Advocacy.
- 3rd Sector Affiliations.
- Cyber Security.

This list isn't exhaustive - if you have skills or experience not listed here, please still get in touch.

What's involved:

4x a year
Hybrid board meetings, approx. 2 hours each

3 months
Induction period with a dedicated mentor

Covered
Reasonable expenses, per our expenses policy

Ready to find out more?

Complete the expression of interest form at **www.harcuk.com** or email **enquiries@harcuk.com**



Social Impact

HARC

HARC Social Value 2025/26

Transforming lives through expert advice, advocacy and representation

Relieving Poverty

- **86%** of clients reported the service they received has increased their income.
- **£5.8 million** secured for local residents, increasing spending power and reducing financial hardship.
- This money was spent in **local communities, supporting local businesses** and **reducing reliance** on crisis services.

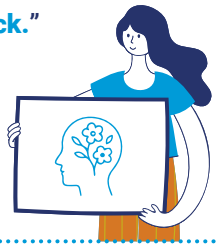


Addressing Inequality

- **£5.4 million secured** for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, helping residents maintain independence, meet essential living costs and participate in community life.
- By helping people access **correct entitlements**, HARC reduced pressure on health, social care and crisis support services.

Improving wellbeing:

- **73%** reported the service **reduced their stress** and/or anxiety and improved their mental health.
- **72%** reported the service made their **life easier.**
- **64%** reported the service **improved their wellbeing.**
- **45%** reported the service **improved their physical health.**
- **38%** of clients said HARC "**gave them their life back.**"



Building Stronger Communities:

- **Reached vulnerable residents through 268 outreach sessions** delivered in foodbanks, wellbeing centres, community venues and rural locations across East Sussex.
- **Created 45 volunteer and work experience oportunities**, helping individuals develop skills. confidence and employability.
- **Strengthened frontline support** services by sharing advice expertise and best practice with local organisations.
- **Helped improve services** for vulnerable residents through active participation in strategic partnerships and boards across East Sussex.

Fighting injustice:

- **624** cases won for people wrongly refused support **(95.4% success rate).**
- **94%** of clients said their options were **clearly explained.**
- **9.6/10** = average client rating of HARC's appeal support.



Looking ahead

Why HARC is different

Advice shouldn't be a postcode lottery, and it shouldn't depend on already knowing what you're entitled to. That's why we don't just process claims - we build relationships, seeing the whole person, not just the form in front of them, and we stick with them from first contact through to tribunal if that's what it takes. It takes time and patience, and the results are harder to measure in a single number but it's why our success rate is so high, and why so many clients tell us they finally felt believed.



The challenges don't stop there

Hastings remains one of the most deprived areas in the country. Rising need meets an advice sector under growing financial pressure while poor health, stigma, and accessibility issues have the potential to stop people reaching us in the first place.

Welfare reform is changing fast

Most of our clients live with a long-term health condition or disability, so changes to PIP assessment, Universal Credit health support, and the Work Capability Assessment will be felt hard here. More people will need our help understanding what's changing, and there will be an increase in the complexity of claims, reviews and appeals. All of which adds more pressure to a sector that is already stretched thin.

Our response for 2027:

- **new outreach** to reach people before crisis point.
- taking part in **collective actions** and **campaigns** with local and national organisations such as the Access to Justice Foundation, Advice UK and the East Sussex VCSE Alliance.
- developing new ways to demonstrate the wider **social value** of what we do.



A call to action

If you fund, commission, or partner with us or others in our sector consider what multi year, flexible funding could do for organisations like ours. It helps us plan ahead, retain skilled advisors, and respond to rising need rather than just react to it.

Whoever you are, consider adding your voice to the call for a fairer approach to welfare reform.

Summarised Accounts

For the year to the 31st of March 2026. Taken from the Annual Report

MONEY IN	
Magdalen & Lasher Charities	£57,939
British Gas Energy trust	£60,045
Local Authority Grants	£41,000
Charity Shops	£126,658
ESCC Benefits Advice Project	£334,785
Henry Smith Charity	£27,520
Other Income	£46,826
Total	**£694,773**

MONEY OUT	
Advice Centre Services	£640,043
Charity Shops	£110,287
Governance	£15,406
Total	**£765,736**

Our work is funded through a combination of statutory grants, charitable trusts and foundations, community funding, and unrestricted income generated through our two charity shops. This mix provides a strong foundation for delivering our services, while recognising the importance of broadening our income base. During the year, we have actively pursued new funding opportunities, developed partnerships, and expanded our fundraising activity to strengthen our long-term financial resilience. Careful financial planning and responsible stewardship of our resources ensure we maximise every pound received to achieve the greatest possible impact for the people and communities we support. While the funding environment remains competitive, our strong relationships with funders and supporters, together with our continued focus on growing new income streams, give us confidence for the future. We remain committed to building a balanced and resilient funding model that enables us to maintain and develop high-quality services for the communities we support.

Thank You!

HARC staff, volunteers, clients and the wider community would like to extend our sincerest thanks to our supporters this year including:

British Gas Energy Trust

Catherine Cirket Discretionary Trust

Chalk Cliff Trust

East Sussex County Council

Foreshore Trust

Hastings Voluntary Action

Jim Jackson Foundation

Kenward Pullen (KP Computers)

London Legal Support Trust

Magdalen & Lasher Charities

Multiple Sclerosis Society

Rother District Council

SGN/Warm Welcome Campaign

Silver Lady Fund

Sussex Community Development Association

Sussex Community Foundation

The Access to Justice Foundation

The Henry Smith Foundation

The Isabel Blackman Foundation

The National Lottery – Awards for All

Contact us

Please contact us if you would like to learn more about HARC and our services, or want to support the work we do:

Email:
enquiries@harcuk.com

HARC Benefit Advice Line:
01424 428375

East Sussex Welfare Benefit Helpline:
03333440681

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

The Advice and Community Hub
Renaissance House
London Road
St Leonards on Sea
East Sussex
TN37 6AN

www.harcuk.com

@info_harc

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

There are a variety of ways you can support our work:

- Volunteering in the shops or office.
- Supporting our campaigns.
- Donating at Just Giving: justgiving.com/hastingsarc

HARC

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

Registered Charity Number 1083566
Private Limited Company Number 04048683

“Please never change – you have been so kind, and I am starting to feel hopeful.

“Everyone at HARC has been brilliant, and it feels so good to actually be listened to.

“You all do a fantastic job, with compassion and professionalism. Please keep it up.



Brochure Design: tesorocreative.com