



Citizens Advice Mole Valley

Research and Campaigns Annual Report
2018/2019

Research and campaigns is one of the twin aims of our service. It aims to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

As a service we have a huge amount of insight and data about the problems our clients and their wider communities face. Through research and campaigns, we use this insight to:

- help us research issues further
- influence decision makers to change policies and practices
- campaign to get decision makers to change policies and practices.

This report provides an update of the research and campaigns activities that have taken part in the last year and progress on development objectives.

Research and Campaigns team

Who's who...

Paul Clark - Research and Campaigns lead/Communications (staff)

Keith Hutton - Research and Campaigns lead (trustee)

Deborah Jones - Chief Officer/Media spokesperson (staff)

Paul Clark/Carol Jolly - Training Officer (*Responsible for research and campaigns training of staff and volunteers*)

Lizzie Blair – Researcher (staff)

Lily Roberts – Researcher (volunteer)

Peggy – Co-ordinator (volunteer)

Involving staff and volunteers

Research and campaigning is included in induction plans

Updates about research and campaigns to volunteers and staff have been provided at:

- Team meetings
- AGM
- Newsletters/circulations
- Intranet

Training opportunities have been provided to all volunteers and staff including:

- An introduction to research and campaigns (provided by Citizens Advice Mole Valley - 7 attendees)
- Research and campaigns forum workshop (provided by Citizens Advice – 2 attendees)
- Citizens Advice National Conference

Research and Campaigns forums

Paul Clark as R&C Lead attended both London R&C Forums in Spring and Autumn, both concentrated on Universal Credit in particular the six weeks wait for a claimant to receive a first payment (reduced to five weeks) and the level of money of benefits which has been frozen since 2016.

Cluster Groups and Surrey Research and Campaigns Team

Citizens Advice Mole Valley has been a long-standing member of the East Surrey R&C Team who include a member from Reigate and Banstead, Oxted, Caterham & Warlingham, Esher & District and Epsom Citizens Advice. We meet three times a year and look at local issues.

Paul Clark is Chair of the Surrey R&C Team which meets quarterly and is made up of Trustees, Chief Officers and/or senior management of all the Citizens Advice offices in Surrey as well as Surrey Welfare Rights. This group was set up to be able to respond rapidly to any issues that may affect our community across the County. It was also felt that the group would have more influence to policy makers. Currently we are running a campaign concerning Personal Independent Payments and have had response from a variety of Government Ministers as well as The Secretary of State for Works and Pensions.

Evidence and research

Evidence Forms

Evidence Forms (EFs) are a type of form on Casebook our case recording system which staff and volunteers complete with evidence of policy or practice issues that are affecting clients unfairly. BEFs are used by local and national research and campaigns workers. 185 Evidence Forms were submitted by 90% of our advisers

Top 5 issues from BEFs (2018/19):
1. Employment Support Allowance
2. Personal Independence Payment
3. Universal Credit
4. Debt
5. Fuel (gas, electricity, oil, coal etc)

Brian* came in to office to discuss problems with his mobility benefits. He has cerebral palsy and this severely affects both his ability to communicate and his mobility. He came to the office on his mobility scooter and had great

difficulty getting in and out of his chair and walking the few feet from the interview room out of the office (he needed to hold on to the wall and needed help to get up out of the chair).

Client was moved in early 2017 from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment. The application was made in April 2017 and notification of the decision was written on July 2017. The decision was that he should receive enhanced rate care (GBP82.30 per week and standard rate mobility GBP21.80 per week). Because he was no longer receiving enhanced rate mobility he received a letter from Motability telling him that he needed to arrange to hand back his car before 7th February 2017. He has since spoken to Motability and this has been extended to 14th August.

Client told me that he was desperate and angry about the decision. We helped client write o the DWP for a Mandatory Reconsideration and since we thought that this case was quite unique in its unfairness we wrote to his Member of Parliament who in turn wrote to the Secretary of State to highlight his case.

In August DWP overturned their decision and Brian was able to keep his mobility scooter

*Clients name changed

Network Panel

The network panel is a monthly survey for all staff, volunteers and trustees within Citizens Advice. It is used by the policy and research teams at Citizens Advice to conduct regular surveys into the experience and opinions of local Citizens Advice. Each month it asks a set of standard questions about clients problems, asks questions focused on a particular topic and asks about emerging issues.

Our data

Updates on our advice data and bureau evidence forms have been provided to the trustee board throughout the year

Top 5 issues from AIC's (2018/19):	2017/18 position
1. Benefits and Tax Credits	→ (1)
2. Debt	→ (2)
3. Housing	→ (3)
4. Employment	→ (4)
5. Relationship and Family	→ (5)

Research

Participation in national research

Mobile Phone research – We contributed to a national research project on mobile phone rights, however we targeted 17-18 year olds. We asked the young people if they knew what to do if their phone broke who was responsible for its repair as well as other questions. 80% of the young people knew their rights compared to only 5% in the general population.

Basic Bank Account – We conducted research on how easy it was to open up a basic bank account in Leatherhead. Our Debt Specialist went in to all the high street banks in Leatherhead to see how easy it would be for a client to open a basic bank account. We discovered that the main banks had different policies when opening any type of account and they required different forms of ID/proof of residence. One bank did realise that low income customers or people on benefits may struggle to have photo ID and would make appropriate adjustments.

Campaigns

Participation in national campaigns

Scams Awareness Month 2018 - Throughout the month, we tweeted many of the key messages provided by Citizens Advice, following their weekly themes. We were retweeted (specifically on Scams Month tweets) 10 times, including by local partners. In addition, we displayed posters in our reception room and had pamphlets to give to any client who was interested.

Big Energy Saving Week – Throughout the week we had posters in the interview rooms encouraging clients to think about their energy usage and to see if they are getting the best possible deal using our Gas and Electricity Comparison Tool which can be found <https://energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk>

Participation in informal and formal channels of influence

MP contact – we wrote to Sir Paul Beresford MP twice once concerning the roll out of Universal Credit and supporting a Private Members Bill concerning disrepair of private rented properties.

Councillor engagement - The team share information from dashboards with local councillors including the leader and cabinet and offer meetings to discuss any emerging trends highlighted by our data. We write to newly appointed councillors to invite them in to one of our offices to discuss the work we do.

Cluster group attendance - this is a group of research and campaign team members from across the region who meet to discuss common issues and may work on joint research and campaigns where we identify regional issues.

Communication

We have a monthly one page spread in The Challenger which a free magazine distributed across Surrey, topics have included going abroad, employment issues and housing.

We have set up a Twitter account and have Tweeted over 400 tweets and have 156 followers. You can follow us here :-

<https://twitter.com/MoleValleyCA>
