



# **Citizens Advice Mole Valley**

**Research and Campaigns Annual Report**  
2020/2021

---

Research and campaigns (R&C) 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 campaign activities that have taken place in the last year and progress on development objectives.

The onset of Covid 19 and dealing with a global pandemic on an unprecedented scale meant that 2020 / 2021 was a very challenging year for all of us. Some R&C resources had to be channelled into ensuring we continued to deliver a high-quality advice service to members of our community. This inevitably resulted in some of our goals as set out in our R&C Action Plan not being achieved.

---

## 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)

Lizzie Blair – Researcher (volunteer)

Paul Clark/Carol Jolly - Training Supervisor (*Responsible for research and campaigns training for staff, trustees and volunteers*)

### Involving volunteers, trustees and paid staff

Research and campaigning is included in staff and volunteer induction plans

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

- Team meetings – paid staff, volunteer and trustee
- APM
- Newsletters/circulations
- Intranet

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

- An introduction to research and campaigns (delivered by Citizens Advice Mole Valley)
- Citizens Advice Online National Conference attended by Staff and Volunteers

### **Research and Campaigns forums**

London R&C Forum which were usually held during Spring and Autumn were cancelled due to the pandemic although some online webinars were held.

### **Cluster Groups and Surrey Research and Campaigns Team**

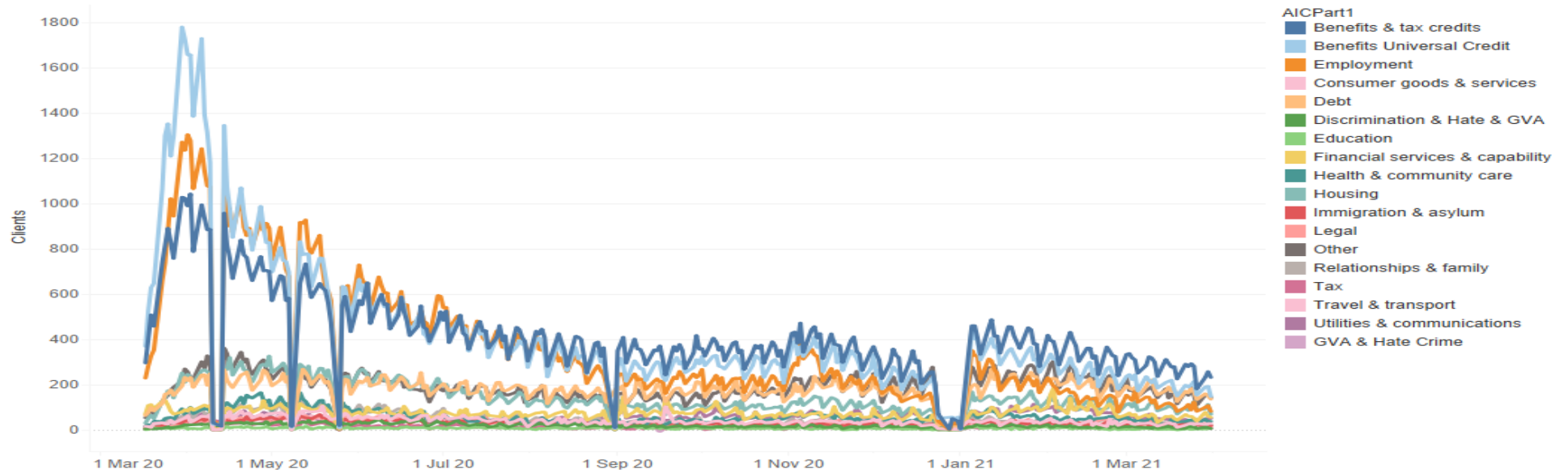
It was decided that we would temporarily suspend all cluster group team meetings during the pandemic and plan to lift the suspension in late 2021. However, communications continued through our Workplace group and usual methods of communication such as email.

---

## Evidence and Research

In March 2020 before the first national lockdown Citizens Advice asked advisers to add a tag to any cases that may be linked to Coronavirus. You can see by the National chart below that the first 3 months we had an extremely high amount of people contacting us concerned about Universal Credit and employment as they were concerned about their livelihood. This initial evidence was given to Government policy makers who were able to address what actions needed to be addressed to help us all through this testing time. Some of the main policies that effected our clients was the furlough scheme, suspension of domestic evictions, debt collections being put on hold and the Universal Credit £20 weekly uplift put in place.

**CoronaVirus Tag: P1 graph**  
Count of clients



It is interesting to note that for a short period in May 2020 employment issues was the main issue clients were contacting us. There was a confusion about how the furlough scheme worked and we would receive enquiries from employees and employers alike. You will also notice that throughout the year clients have contacted us with Coronavirus related enquiries.

### **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.

EFs are used by local and national research and campaigns workers. 140 Evidence Forms were submitted this year which is about 40 less than the previous year. Though as mentioned previously many issues have been put on hold due to the pandemic.

Below is a breakdown on the issues from the top five areas of enquiries EFs were submitted

<b>Area of Enquiry</b>	<b>Number of Advice Issues Codes</b>
<b>Universal Credit</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Legacy Benefits</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Debt</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Employment</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>16</b>

The majority of EFs were submitted by our Help to Claim team and our Caseworkers, it is presumed that our generalist advisers did not submit as many this year due to a number of factors, mainly that we delivered our services on the most part remotely via telephone and email and at times difficult to know what impact a policy maybe having on a client. It would also be noted that policy priorities lay with coping with the pandemic and as mentioned previously many issues were put on hold.

When we recognised that there was a significant drop of EFs being submitted by our volunteer generalist advisers we asked for some feedback during appraisals, it was noted that since most contacts are/were via telephone and emails enquiries they were often submitted within one specific question so it was more challenging to pick up on unfair practices. Also, with advisers working remotely there was less opportunity to pick up common themes.

### **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.

### **Research**

Though the R&C Lead has kept a close eye on any trends from our Advice Issue Codes and Evidence Forms submitted, no formal piece of research was conducted due to resources having been redirected to service delivery.

---

## Campaigns

### Participation in national campaigns

We participated in the National Campaign to extend the Universal Credit Uplift of £20 per week which the Government had extended till the end of September 2021, and we will be campaigning for this lifeline for the poorest people in our communities to be extended indefinitely. It should be noted that 40% of people who claim Universal Credit are in paid employment but simply need state assistance as their salaries do not cover their daily living expenses. This view is also supported by client data collected by our local foodbanks.

---

### Participation in informal and formal channels of influence

**MP contact** – in January 2021 we wrote to Sir Paul Beresford MP concerning the extension of the Universal Credit £20 uplift.

**Councillor engagement** - The team share information from dashboards with local councillors including the leader, cabinet members and senior officers at both District and County level. We are pleased to attend other meetings with members and officers 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.

We also have created and shared fuel poverty reports; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reports on Domestic Violence issues, clients' ethnicity / BAME with council Analytics and Insight teams as well as other teams planning post pandemic recovery and those targeting resident support. We have contributed as a founding partner with a newly formed community charity based in N Leatherhead.

---

## Communication

We have a monthly one page spread in The Challenger and other local free magazines distributed across Mole Valley, topics have included going abroad, employment issues and housing. We also submitted articles to local Parish magazines throughout the pandemic.

We have set up a Twitter account and have Tweeted over 600 tweets and have 149 followers. You can follow us here: -

<https://twitter.com/MoleValleyCA>

---