

## Research & Campaigns report – Autumn 2024

**Contact with Elected Officials:** We met with Helen Maguire MP in December 2024, alongside colleagues from CA Epsom & Ewell. Letters were sent to both our MPs in early October 2024, ahead of the Autumn Budget, advising that Citizens Advice were requesting the Government to:

- Uprate Local Housing Allowance in line with 30th percentile of local market rent
- Reduce the amount deducted from Universal Credit payment
- Provide targeted energy bill support

Statistics related to the number of clients being seen at both Mole Valley offices were included within the letters.

**Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Data Gathering:** We have continued to gather data monthly as part of a Surrey-wide analysis of available rental housing. The aim of this exercise is to compare the LHA with actual costs of rental accommodation in Mole Valley.

The results for both September and October showed that the current LHA does not cover the cost of any property in Mole Valley. Additionally, the gap between LHA rates and all sizes of accommodation increased substantially from September to October, particularly for families with children.

We shared this information in a press release, leading to an article in the Dorking & Leatherhead Advertiser in December 2024. with the local press.

**Issues and Evidence Forms** In total, 32 evidence forms were submitted in September and October. In total 58 different issues were included within the Evidence forms, with concerns around state benefits, debt, housing, and immigration and asylum being the most frequently raised.

**Digital Exclusion** is a research and campaign issue across the county. Locally, we have produced a helpful information sheet for our clients, outlining support via a range of options, such as coaching in digital skills training and loan of IT equipment for specific groups.

Drawing from information included within the 32 Evidence forms completed in September and October 14 clients were impacted by digital exclusion in one form or another, which is just under 50% of all the Evidence forms completed.