

## Research and Campaigns Trustees Report May 2025 to June 2025

**Report by:** Jacqui Clack

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Short Term Research & Campaigns Volunteer:** Lucy has joined the team for a short period over the summer. Her particular focus will be raising awareness among young people in Mole Valley of the work of Citizens Advice and researching why young people do not access the service as much as other age groups.

**Contact with Elected Officials:** Letters were sent to Helen Maguire MP and Chris Coughlan MP on 21<sup>st</sup> May with the headline - ***Child Poverty Strategy - insight from Citizens Advice Mole Valley*** urging them to use their voices in Parliament to request that the Government scrap the two-child limit and benefit cap in the forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy.

**Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Data Gathering:** I continue to undertake monthly research on the cost of private rented accommodation being advertised on Right Move and SpareRoom.com and to compare these costs against the Local Housing Allowance Rates permitted by the Government.

Surrey Research & Campaigns Group have recently reported back on the results of the Surrey wide data gathering. Findings show that while the Government did increase LHA rates in April 2024, rents have also risen increasingly and so there is still no private rented accommodation available within local housing allowances rates in many boroughs across Surrey.

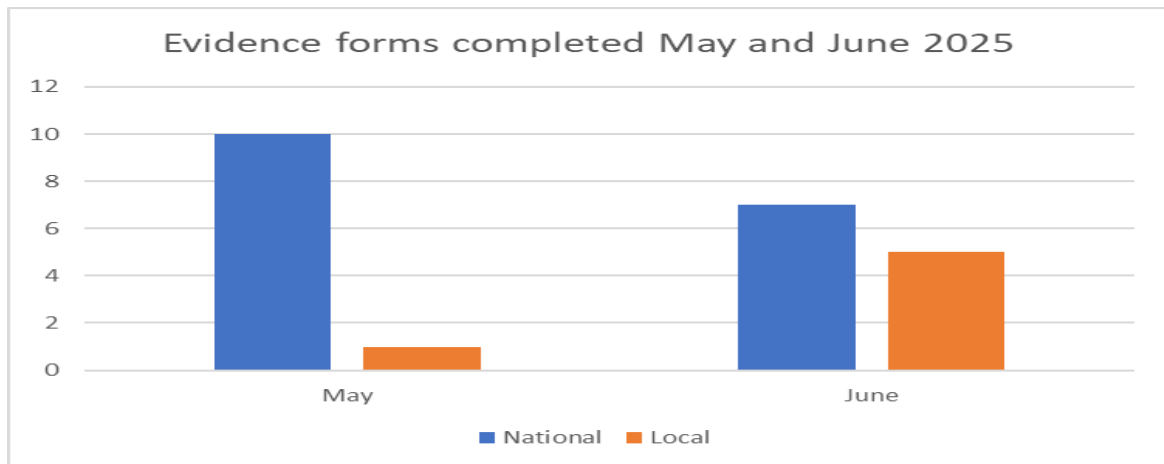
**Surrey Research and Campaigns Group:** I attended the meeting of the Surrey Research and Campaigns Group on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> June.

In addition to reporting back on the LHA research for the whole area (see above), one of the group had completed research on all the different council tax support schemes as local authorities are able to set their own criteria for who qualifies for their scheme.

Findings show that there is a wide difference between local authorities and that Mole Valley has the most generous scheme.

The proposal is to be able to make recommendations to the new Unitary Authorities, when they come into being, with the hope of persuading them to adopt the most generous option from among the newly combined authorities.

**Issues and Evidence Forms:** From 1<sup>st</sup> May to 30<sup>th</sup> June a total of 23 evidence forms were submitted. The chart below indicates the number of evidence forms completed related to calls for evidence on national issues of concern compared with local issues.

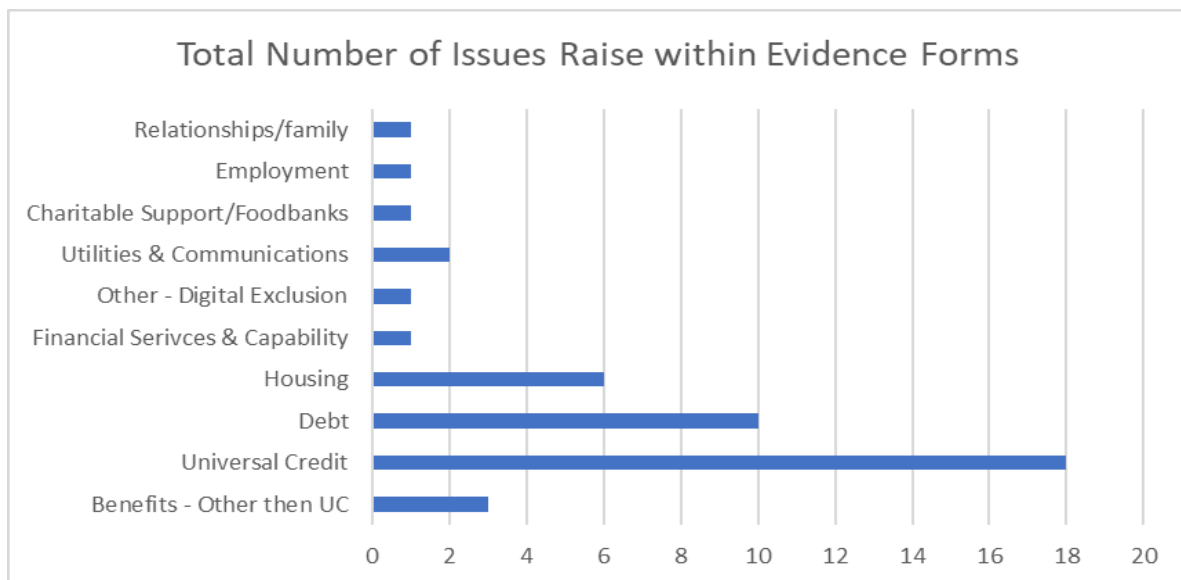


However, during May and June 2025, the 23 evidence forms picked up a total of 46 different issues clients presented with, as multiple problems can be recorded within a single evidence form.

The key areas where evidence forms were raised by advisors remain Welfare Benefits, Universal Credit, Debt and Housing. Within issues related to Universal Credit over half was related to Managed Migration, where clients are having to move from old style benefits onto Universal Credit, which makes demands on the client that they are not used to and often are unable to manage without support.

Within the 10 evidence forms created for debt issues a total of 4 related to issues with bailiffs.

Digital Exclusion appears low but this is due to the fact that it appears to be picked up under other areas like applying for benefits or managing a claim. A reading of the actual Evidence forms would increase the number of Digital Exclusion issues from 1 to 7 over the two-month period.



**Local Research & Campaigns concerns:** A total of 5 evidence forms were completed related to local issues in the Mole Valley area.

Two evidence forms are related to lack of affordable private rented accommodation in the area and the significant shortfall between Local Housing Allowance and rent charged by private landlords.

In both cases the impact is likely to impact on children having to move schools and potentially loss of employment, especially in the case where Mole Valley Council are likely to place the client in emergency accommodation right outside the area.

Two evidence forms relate to issues with the local social housing landlord Clarion. One issue related to disrepair, poor communication which led to a complaint being raised with the Housing Ombudsman.

The second issue related to inconsistent reporting of eligible service charges to Universal Credit which left the client with less benefits towards these costs than the client was entitled to.

The fifth local evidence form completed related to bailiff action on an outstanding council tax debt. Citizens Advice had advised Jacobs, the debt collection agency that the client was in a deficit budget and had provided evidence to that effect. However, the response from Jacobs was that they would continue with enforcement procedures unless the client agreed to and set up a payment plan.