

## Research and Campaigns Trustees Report November 2024 to January 2025

**Report by:** Jacqui Clack

**Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

**Contact with Elected Officials:** Our CEO, chair of trustees and retiring chair attended a meeting with Helen McGuire on 2<sup>nd</sup> December with colleagues from Epsom & Ewell. We are aiming that ongoing meetings will be held jointly with colleagues from Epsom & Ewell as Helen McGuire MP covers Epsom & Ewell alongside Leatherhead & Ashted. Helen McGuire has expressed concern over the gap between LHA rates and available private rented accommodation and had advised she will be raising this in Parliament.

We are the process of arranging a meeting with Chris Cohan MP for Dorking & Horley.

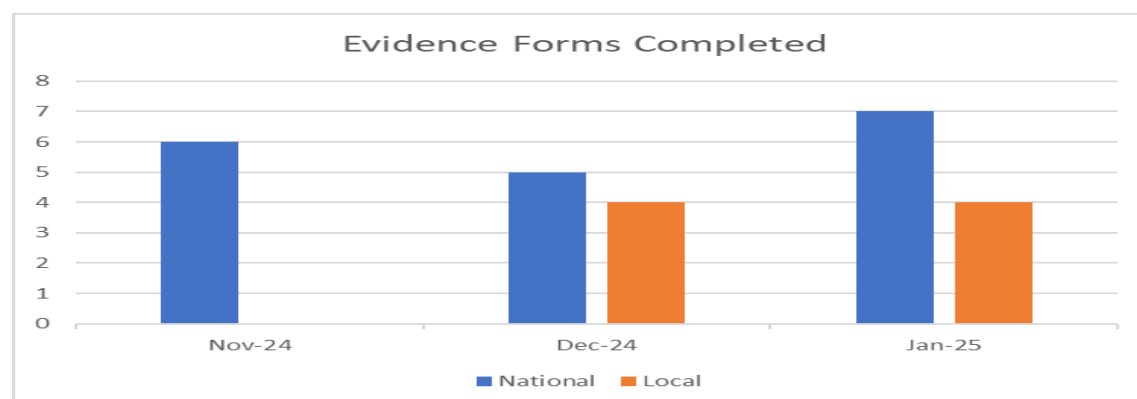
**Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Data Gathering:** I have continued to gather data on a monthly basis as part of a Surrey-wide analysis of available rental housing. The aim of this exercise is to compare the LHA with actual costs of available rental accommodation in Mole Valley.

The results for continue to reveal that there is no accommodation of any type in the Mole Valley area that sits within the Local Housing Allowance rates for either Leatherhead or Dorking.

During February we will join with all Citizens Advice Partners who are part of Surrey Research & Campaigns Group to correlate rent figures for the whole of Surrey.

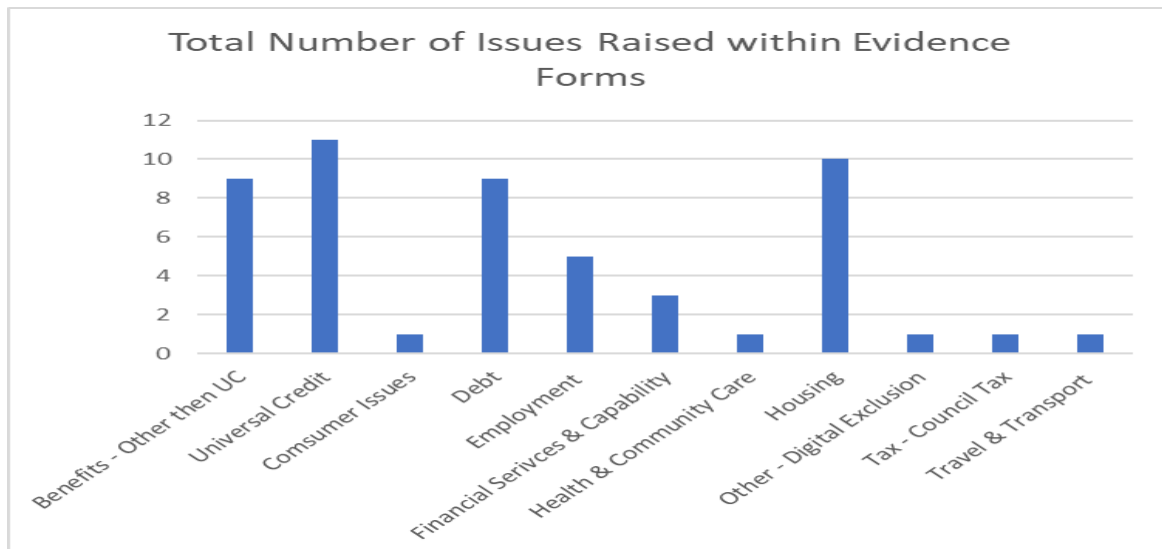
**Press Release:** Dorking & Leatherhead Advertiser published a press release from Mole Valley Citizens Advice in early December titled "Many Low Wage Earners Can't Afford Cost of Renting a Home which was based on the ongoing monthly research Mole Valley is collecting.

**Issues and Evidence Forms** In total, 26 evidence forms were submitted from the beginning of November 2024 to the end of January 2025. The chart below indicates the number of evidence forms completed related to calls for evidence on national issues of concern compared with local issues.



As multiple problems clients are facing can be recorded within a single evidence form, the total number of issues recorded from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025 was 52.

The key areas where evidence forms were raised by advisors were benefits, Universal Credit, Debt and Housing. Digital Exclusion appears low but this is due to the fact that it appears to being 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 9.



**Surrey Research and Campaigns Group:** I attended the meeting of Surrey Research and Campaigns Group, of which Mole Valley is a member on 11<sup>th</sup> December. It was agreed at this meeting that all Citizens Advice Offices within the group would complete research of the cost of private rented accommodation within their area and compare the median cost to the Local Housing Allowance rates set by the Valuation Office Authority and the DWP. Other areas of concern from the group were issues related to delays in Blue Badge applications and the ongoing issue of digital exclusion.

**Local Research & Campaigns concerns:** A total of 8 evidence forms were completed related to local issues in the Mole Valley area.

- Three evidence forms were related to Mole Valley Council Tax debts. Of the three, one concern was about a council tax debt that had been passed to a debt collection agency and where Mole Valley District Council would not agree to an affordable repayment plan. Another was where a debt collection agency threatened a vulnerable client with a history of suicide with “committal proceedings” if the moneys owing were not paid.
- One issue was related to a client facing antisocial behaviour from a housing association tenant. While another issue was a lack of tenancy support for vulnerable client despite request from Citizens Advice to Clarion Housing Association.
- One evidence form was completed related to Digital exclusion regarding migrating from ESA (Disability Benefit) to Universal Credit which requires a lot of online activity.
- Another evidence form related to a vulnerable client facing discrimination at work.
- The last evidence form related to a client with a family at risk of homelessness who was unable to find affordable accommodation in the local area.