

Research and Campaigns Trustees Report September 2025 to October 2025

Report by: Jacqui Clack

Date: 1st November 2025

Short Term Research & Campaigns Volunteer: Lucy and I had our final wrap up meeting with Alison on 17th September. Lucy has written a detailed report from the findings of the research we completed among the 16-25 age group in Mole Valley and a summary of her view of the CAMV website, with some recommendations for change. Overall, Lucy expressed that she gained a lot from her time volunteering with us and may see if she is available for further opportunities next summer.

Contact with Elected Officials: There has been a lot of joint working taking place with our local MPs. Chris Coghlan MP contacted the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about removing the two-child benefit cap and received a response in August. We also asked our MPs to raise with the government the following points, ahead of the Autumn Budget on 26 November:

- Uprate Local Housing Allowance in line with 30th percentile of local market rent
- Scrap the two-child limit and benefit cap
- Ensure low income families can cover essential utility bills this winter

Helen Maguire MP shared the response she received from the Minister of State for Social Security and Disability. All letters and emails sent to our local MPs always include details of what is happening in their own constituencies. Raising key issues helps to keep them at the forefront of Ministers' minds.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Data Gathering: I have continued to complete monthly research of the gap between LHA rates and rent being charged by private landlords. Interestingly, Shelter have also raised this issue with central government ahead of the Budget, as observed on the BBC news on 22nd October 2025.

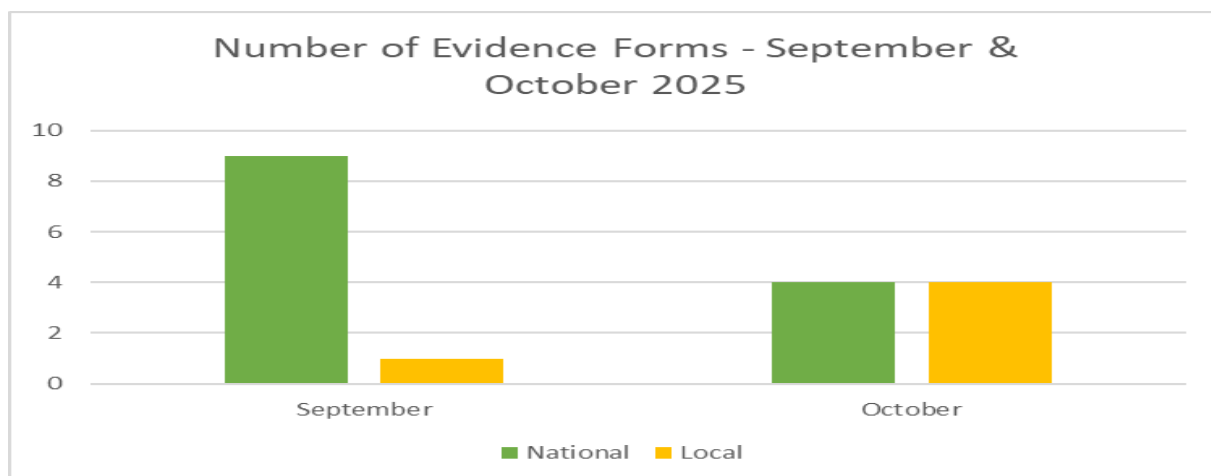
Surrey Research & Campaigns Group: I attended the meeting 17th September. The group discussed the following:

LHA / rents - the group agreed to continue monitoring Local Housing Allowance (LHA) vs rent. Mole Valley research shows significant shortfalls in LHA rates across all size categories. The group also discussed the potential impact of new unitary authorities on LHA areas, noting that the boundaries are set by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and may not align with the proposed unitary boundaries.

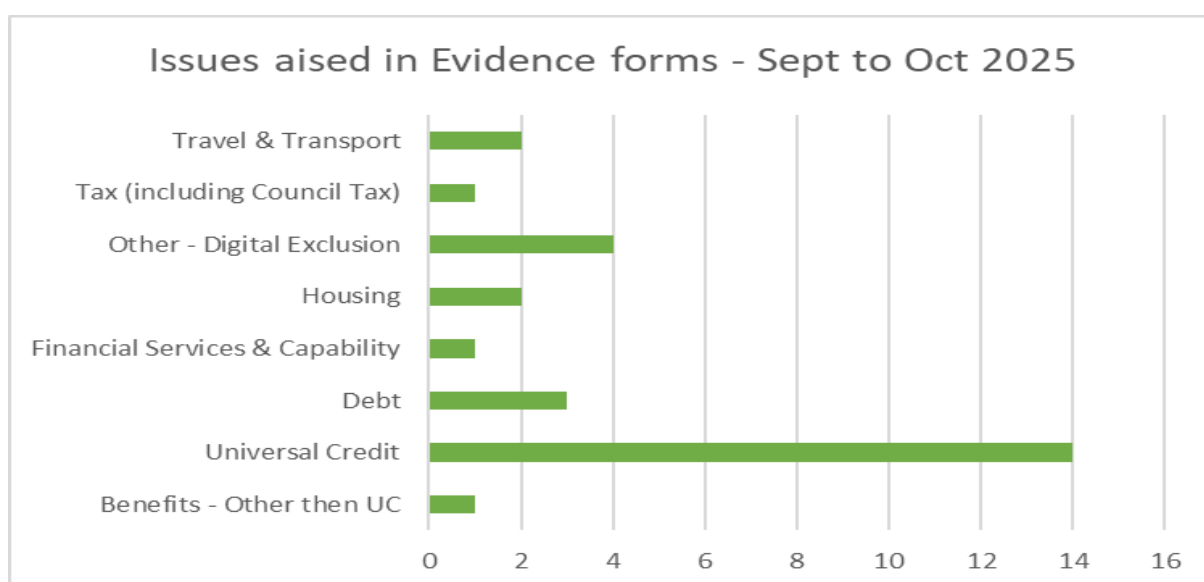
Council Tax - The group discussed council tax support schemes and their variations across different boroughs. It was agreed that all offices would compile evidence forms and case studies to inform a suggested policy ahead of unitary authority changes in 2026-27. The team agreed to create a skeleton outline for a new council tax support scheme, drawing on national organisation resources including a 2024 blog by Maddy Rose and the Council Tax Protocol, with a focus on eliminating the use of bailiffs as a debt collection method.

Work undertaken in Mole Valley - I also reported the summer research project Mole Valley had completed among young people in Mole Valley to raise awareness of the work of Citizens Advice and find out what the key concerns were that young people faced. Additionally, I was able to share information about drop-in events held in Dorking, Bookham and Fetcham jointly with Chris Coghlan MP.

Issues and Evidence Forms: From 1st September to 31st October a total of 18 evidence forms were submitted. The chart below indicates the number of forms completed related to calls for evidence on national issues of concern compared with local issues.



The forms picked up a total of 28 different issues clients presented with, as multiple problems can be recorded within a single evidence form.



Problems with Universal Credit (UC) remains the main reason an Evidence Form is raised by advisors – forms covered deductions clients were having taken from their benefits and issues around managed migration to UC. Digital Exclusion remains an issue for clients.

Local Research & Campaigns concerns

- Dorking library had no staff available to help with printing a tax return form.
- Local Banking Hub were unable to help client pay rent to Clarion due to outdated app on client's phone – digital exclusion issue.
- The Shared Service Centre at Surrey County Council won't answer telephone enquiries, only emails – digital exclusion issue.
- Difficulty claiming a disabled bus pass after points categorisation layout in PIP application prevented bus pass eligibility, despite client previously receiving a bus pass.

- Council tax liability being enforced for temporarily staying in alternative accommodation whilst major repairs to their own social housing were being carried out.