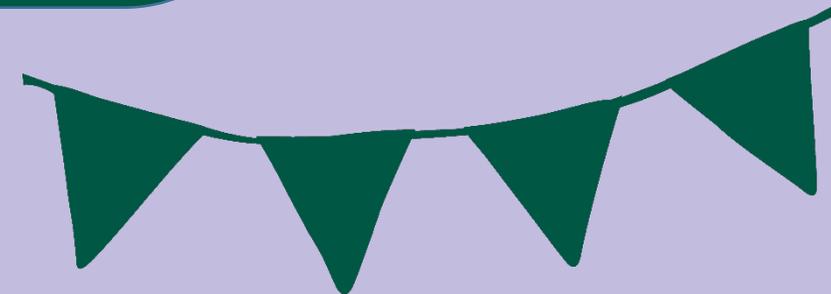


**Surrey Welfare Rights Unit
Impact Report
2017/18**



Our value to society in 2017/18

Why the need for Surrey Welfare Rights Unit?

In February 2018 the Work and Pensions Select Committee published its report on PIP and ESA assessments. The Chair, Frank Field MP, when referring to the widespread findings of poor administration of both benefits, said “this is translating into untenable human costs to claimants and financial costs to the public purse.”

The DWP did not fair well in other parts of the social security system with further widespread maladministration affecting tens of thousands of ESA claimants who have missed out on disability premiums, and a misguided attempt to restrict PIP through regulatory change which backfired and had to be removed with further numbers of claimants now waiting to be compensated.

There are probably years ahead of ensuring that vulnerable people who were incorrectly paid or refused benefit are identified and supported to claim all they are due. This work is already underway at the Unit.

The need for organisations to undertake complex casework including representation was once again underlined by two stark statistics recently released; legal aid funding for welfare benefits cases is now **1%** of what it was in 2010/11 and the rapid rise in benefit appeals has outstripped the Tribunal Service’s ability to recruit and train sufficient numbers of panel members according to the Social Entitlement Chamber President.

During 2018 Surrey residents will face further complexity with the introduction of Universal Credit across the County. With UC comes a whole raft of new labyrinthine rules, especially for workers. These include minimum income floor rules, surplus earnings rules and transitional protection for claimants who will be migrated.

Surrey families will also be affected by the planned roll-out of the highly controversial 2-child limit to benefits. An estimated 2m children will be affected by this rule by 2020, undoubtedly leading to pressures on other statutory services.

A few words from the Trustee Board

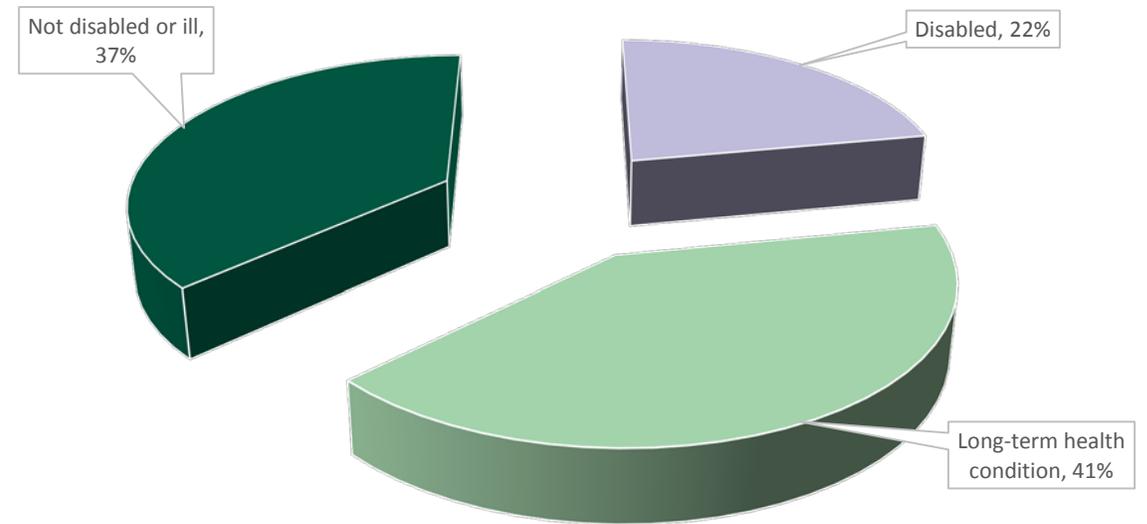
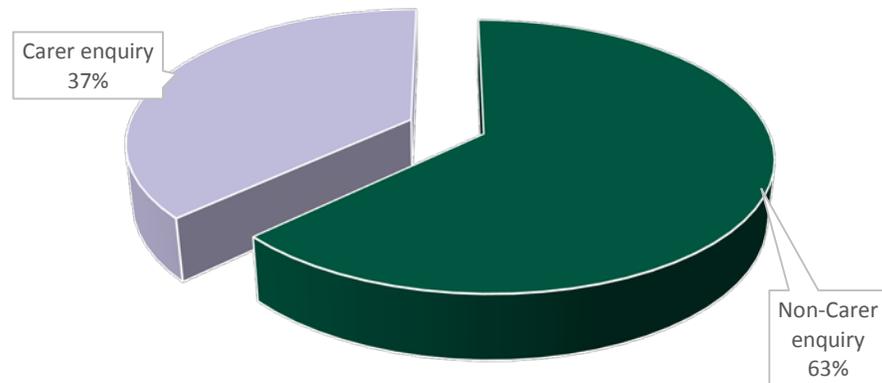
This has been another busy and challenging year for the Unit. Welfare reform continues apace bringing its own issues. A much valued adviser retired after many years loyal service. A successful recruitment exercise has been completed and new member of the team started in March. However the quality of work, dedication and enthusiasm continues unchanged in the face of ever more complex cases. The Trustee Board is very grateful to all the team for their commitment and all the excellent work they do for people in our area.

This report summarises the work and its results in various ways and it reflects the huge difference the work of the unit makes to the people we help. We must also remember the advice and support we provide to many advice agencies around the region giving them the skills and confidence to do even better for their clients.

We remain extremely grateful to all our supporters and funders without whom none of this would be possible.

We helped those most in need

The percentage of queries from Carer households increased from 35% to 37%. The poor administration of both ESA and PIP is reflected in the high number of our clients who have a disability or long-term health condition. Often, benefits for the Carer and Cared for person are fundamentally linked and advice has to fully consider the impact of claims for both individuals. Most of our Upper Tribunal casework concerned disability benefits; over the coming year(s) we want to see significant improvements in DWP administration which would have a direct improvement on the lives of Carers and those they care for.

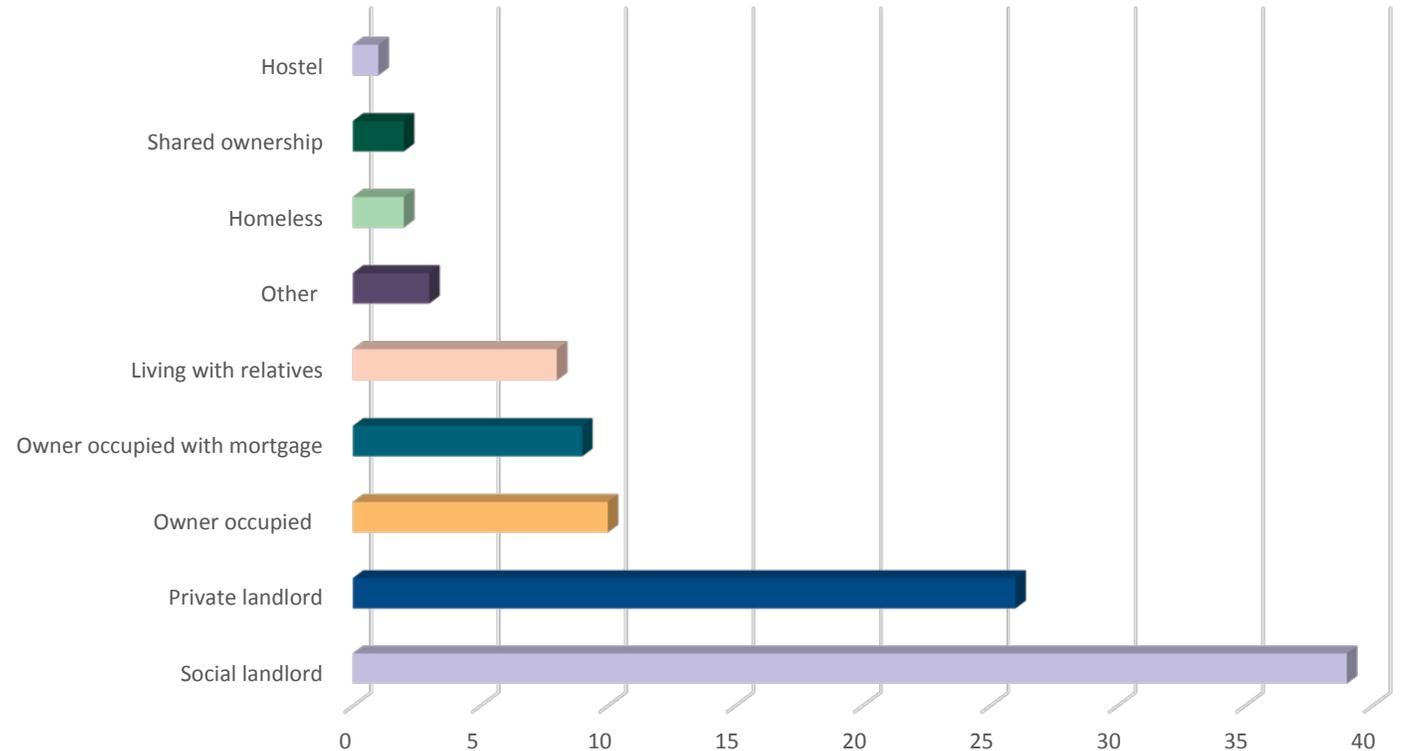


We helped those most in need

The breakdown of housing type across our clients is a very different picture from the wider Surrey population. Across Surrey 14% of local residents live in private rented accommodation, 26% of our clients are private sector tenants. Only 11% live in social housing, but 39% of our clients have a social landlord. Overpayments of Housing Benefit was the second highest Debt category recorded during this year.

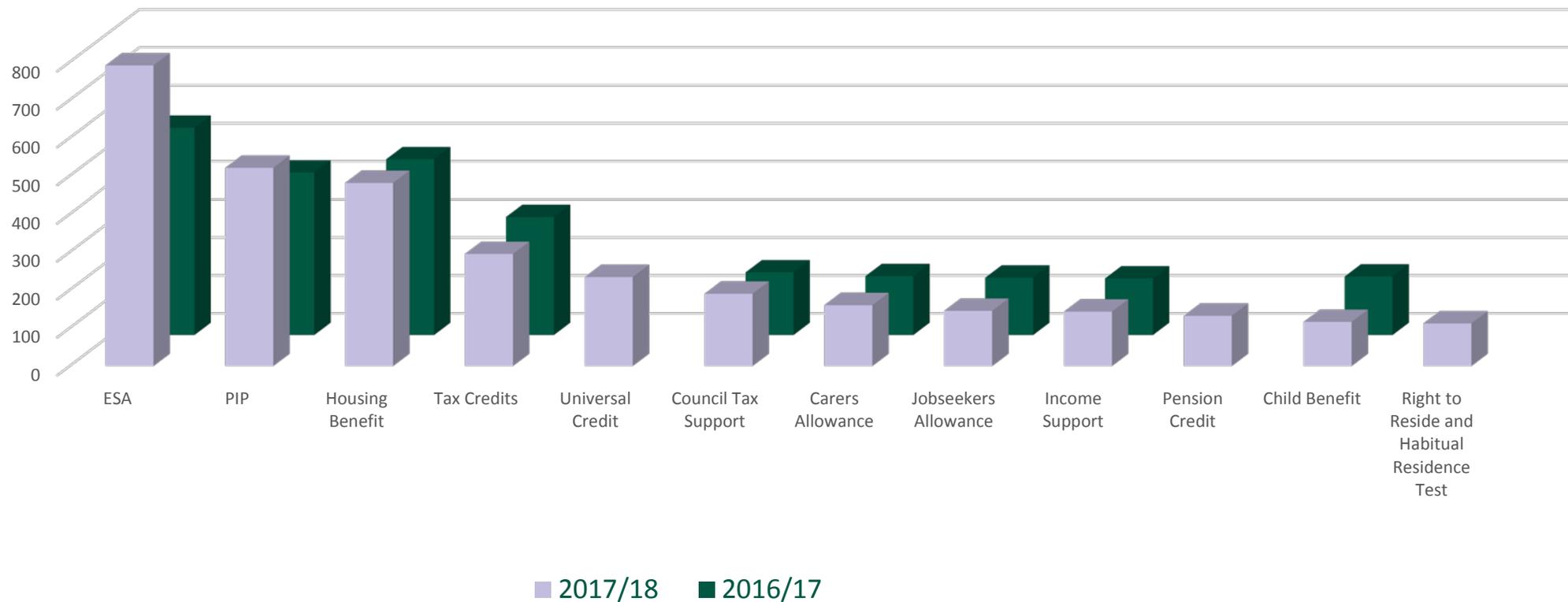
We have been advising and training housing options teams within borough and district councils, ensuring that they have up to date information on benefit advances, alternative payment arrangements and how changes of circumstance affect payments of UC, so that the tenants they are helping cope with the change to single monthly payments in arrears.

Housing Status of SWRU clients - %



.....with these benefit problems

Top 12 enquiry issues



In total our advice had this much value



Financial Outcomes direct and indirect

£3,653,374

Client benefit gain confirmed £747,079

Services secured £27,495

Overpayments written off £5,088



Our Fiscal Benefit was £158,492

Saving to NHS £64,070

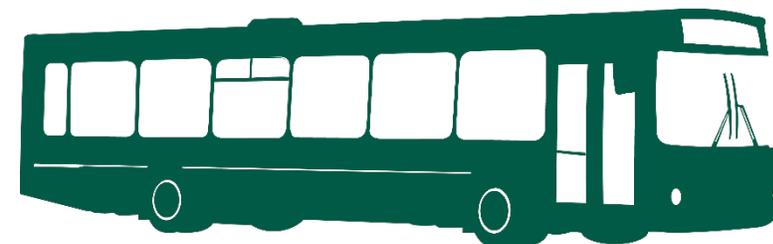
Saving to DWP £44,132

Saving to Criminal Justice System £1,373

Homelessness prevention savings £32,242

Our Public Value was £1,567,047

Public Value: Improvements in health, well-being, participation and productivity.



How we work out our value

Citizens Advice help us calculate our value using a Treasury approved cost-benefit tool. Four key variables are considered.

Affected population: Number of people receiving advice about a specific issue

Impact: Impact of advice on a specific outcome

Deadweight: What would have happened anyway without our advice

Optimism bias: Accounting for best practice, timeliness and independence of research

We know from the feedback from our users that the expertise of the Advice Team is extremely valued. It saves advisers time and ensures the right advice is given from the start of an enquiry; so avoiding unnecessary challenges and appeals. By supporting advisers with their advice and casework, and by providing ongoing opportunities for training, these skilled staff and volunteers go forward to help many thousands more local residents.

Furthermore our research and campaigning has raised issues on behalf of our clients at local and national level. A local council changed their online information about Hardship Payments because of our evidence; we wrote to all Surrey MPs about restricting benefits to two children retrospectively, and earlier this year we were invited to discuss the lower benefit cap on BBC Radio. Currently we are collating evidence on Universal Credit and supporting the Citizens Advice campaign to pause the roll-out until the most serious problems with the system have been resolved.

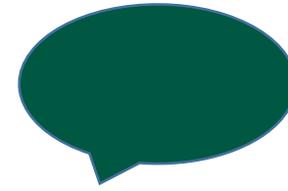
Part of a bigger picture

Funders ask why the local Citizens Advice service can't help the clients we support. The answer is that local Citizens Advice offer generalist advice; and those services are excellent. Most have no funded casework service and those that do are restricted by geography or funder priorities. The Unit's services are part of the advice services landscape. We exist to provide justice for clients who face the most discrimination, the most intractable benefit problems and to ensure our advice partners can get on and help their clients.

Many of the organisations we support are not advice services. But they know their clients and when they have a benefit problem, they are best placed, with support from the Unit, to help their clients resolve those issues. There is little point in only focussing on housing conditions, debts or mental health support if that person's benefit has been stopped. Poverty affects every corner of a person's life. Not just physical and mental health, but it stops participation, motivation, and if essential costs cannot be met, then a spiral of debt and third party recovery can quickly follow. Early action is essential. The recent welfare reforms have, in part, shifted the risks onto the claimant. There are some safeguards that can help mitigate these risks but most of these require advice, access and for vulnerable clients, support. Vulnerable clients in Surrey will need to know, over the coming years, about benefit advances, alternative payment arrangements and other parts of the system that have been set up to help claimants cope. However, one part of the Universal Credit system that will be a substantial change for claimants is the digital by default delivery.

We will need to work together to ensure that locally, vulnerable claimants are supported to meet the conditions of UC, particularly if they are working or if they have limited capacity for work. We will continue to deliver training and provide information on what exactly claimants are expected to report, and when, and we will be guided by our partner organisations to tell us what other resources they need from this Autumn when UC arrives.

What they said.....



“Everyone said how much they enjoyed the training and really felt that they had learned some valuable information which they will be using with clients”

“Very pleased with the helpful and prompt service we receive from Surrey Welfare Rights Unit”

“Our work would be so much harder without you and your team’s invaluable support”

“I think you do a brilliant job”

“I received an excellent service and support throughout a very stressful time”

“I would have found the legal knowledge a real difficulty throughout my PIP appeals and probably would have given up”



Training the advice sector

24 SWRU courses delivered

229 local advice workers trained

11 commissioned courses delivered

198 local staff and volunteers trained

24 workshops, talks and information events delivered

460 local residents and professionals attended talks or received one-to-one advice at local events

Working with others for better client outcomes

Surrey and Borders NHS Trust – Engage programme

Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum

Surrey Coalition of Disabled People

Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum

YMCA East Surrey

Walton Charity

St Peters Hospital

Walton and Weybridge Foodbank

Surrey Choices

Surrey Muslim Association

Your Sanctuary

Guildford Advice Network

Cobham Foodbank

Disability Initiative

Surrey County Council Welfare Reform Coordination Group

Surrey Local Assistance Scheme

Surrey Care Leavers Service

Surrey Youth Support

Citizens Advice Surrey

Surrey Local Citizens Advice Bureaux

HMCTS

Jobcentre Plus

Surrey Members of Parliament

Action for Carers Surrey

Who we are

Staff

Kieran Anderson – Welfare Rights Adviser

Sarah Fell – Welfare Rights Adviser

Carol Gibbs – Senior Welfare Rights Adviser

Helen Haws – Welfare Rights Adviser

Ray Savage – Administrator

Maria Zealey – Unit Manager

We would like to thank

Surrey County Council

Surrey Clinical Commissioning Groups

Woking Borough Council

Elmbridge Borough Council

Guildford Borough Council

Trustees

Anne Haigh – Chair

David Booth – Treasurer

Alison Cox – Secretary

Jane Bourgeois

Roger Hurcombe

John Fairley

Sophia Platts

Surrey Welfare Rights Unit aims to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

We provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

Surrey Welfare Rights Unit
Company Number: 3335128
Charity Number: 1062826
FCA Number: FRN 617760
OISC Registered
AQS Standards in Welfare
Benefits Casework and
Telephone Support