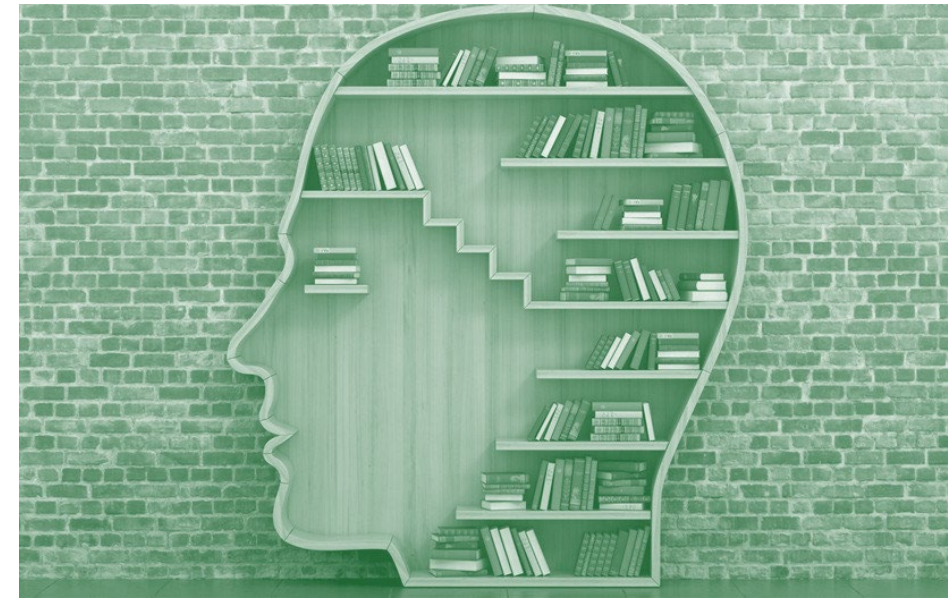


**Surrey Welfare Rights Unit
Impact Report
2020/21**



Welfare Rights during a pandemic

From the very start of the year we had to hit the ground running, keeping up with a relentless stream of statutory, and non-statutory changes to social security rules. We introduced a new section on our website where we posted articles that were specific to what residents were experiencing: Are you unable to work because you are shielding? Has your employer made you redundant? Are you unable to work due to sickness? Within the first few months of 2020/21 we had written and started delivering a completely new e-training programme, which was a steep learning curve for both trainers and delegates who were used to our in-person courses.

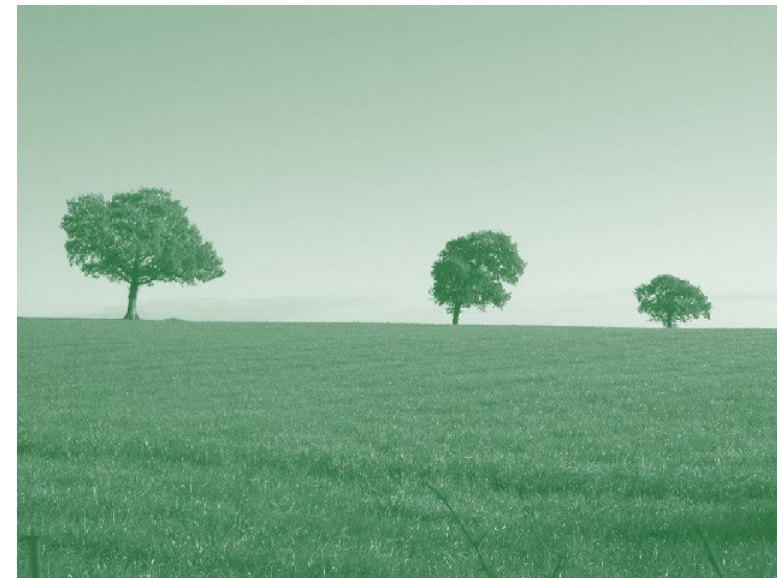
There remain significant uncertainties for current and future benefit recipients: the migration onto Universal Credit, future planned cuts to payments, and the spectre of more demand for welfare support as Government furlough and self-employment schemes end. In addition, there are also huge unknowns regarding the long-term health and financial impacts of Covid on ill and disabled people, and Carers.



A few words from the Trustee Board

The Trustee Board are very proud of what the Unit has achieved over the last year. The description in this report of the work done, outcomes achieved and the almost seamless transition to working from home during such difficult times does not do justice to the dedication, professionalism and hard work of all the staff. Being available to our clients and trying to achieve the best outcomes for every enquiry has continued, we have learnt from the experience and taken on board feedback in order to deliver the best service possible.

The Board would like to express their thanks to all the team and to our funders and supporters without whom none of the work summarised here would have been possible. We look forward to serving the community to the same high standard as we all try to deal with the legacy of the pandemic and other changes in our society.



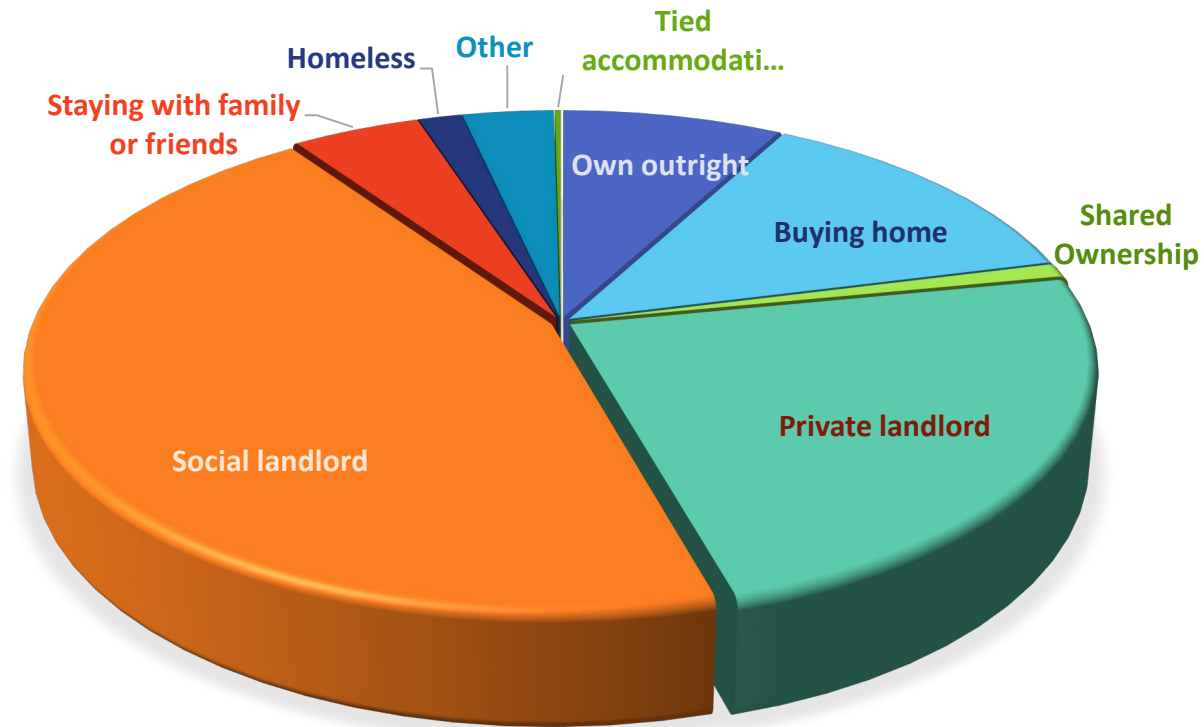
We helped those most in need

We report on benefit statistics elsewhere in this report, but our non-benefit data clearly shows that, during this past year, benefit problems were not experienced in isolation to other problems. Our statistics reports show enquiries concerning Council Tax were up 125%, and Council Tax arrears also showed a significant rise. Enquiries from self-employed residents rose by 133%, and queries from employees regarding pay and entitlements rose 53%.

We have always answered queries relating to community care, and during 2020/21 queries about adult social care rose 33%.

Unsurprisingly, considering the June 2021 deadline for the EU settled status scheme, enquiries from workers about immigration rose by 500%.

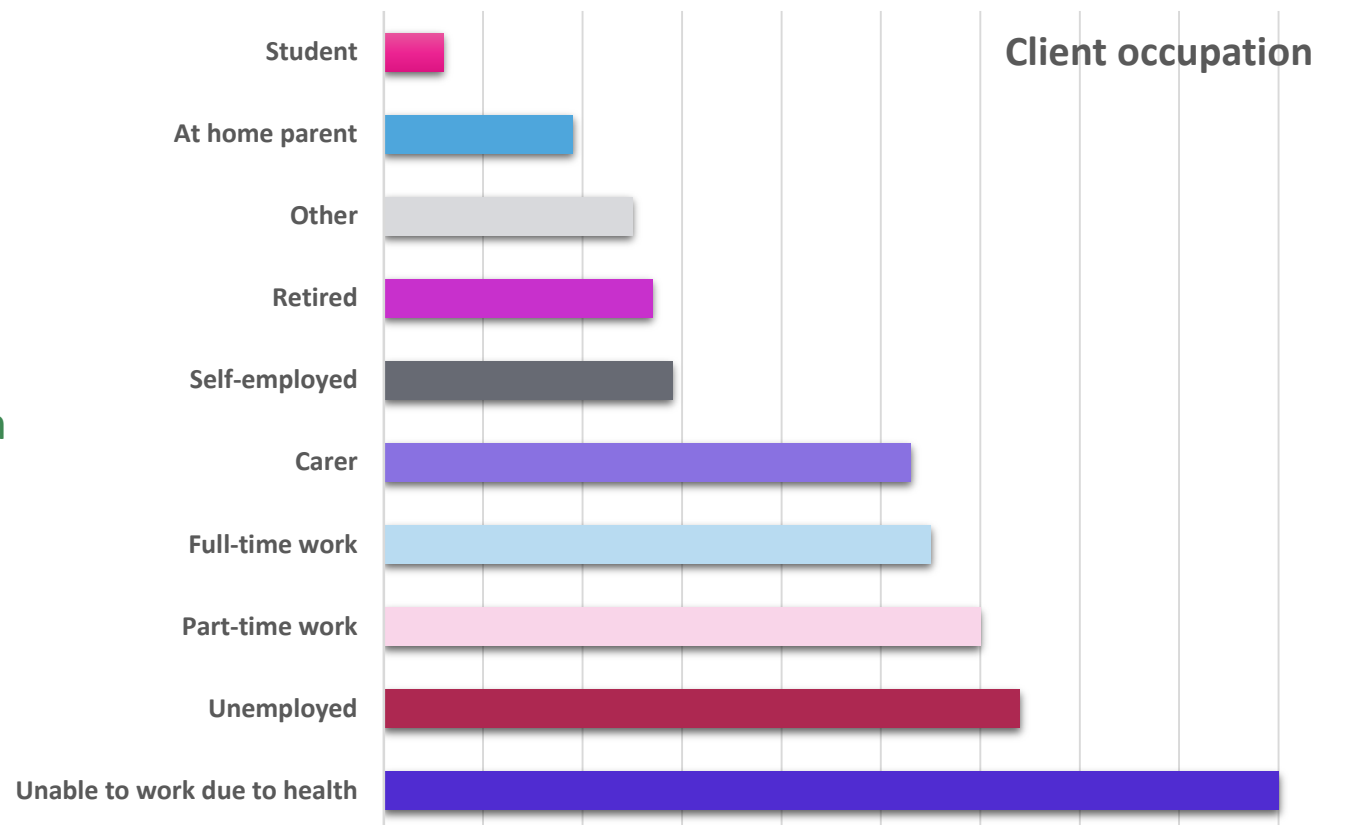
And, like other local agencies supporting the most vulnerable, we saw a rise of 100% on enquiries about foodbanks.



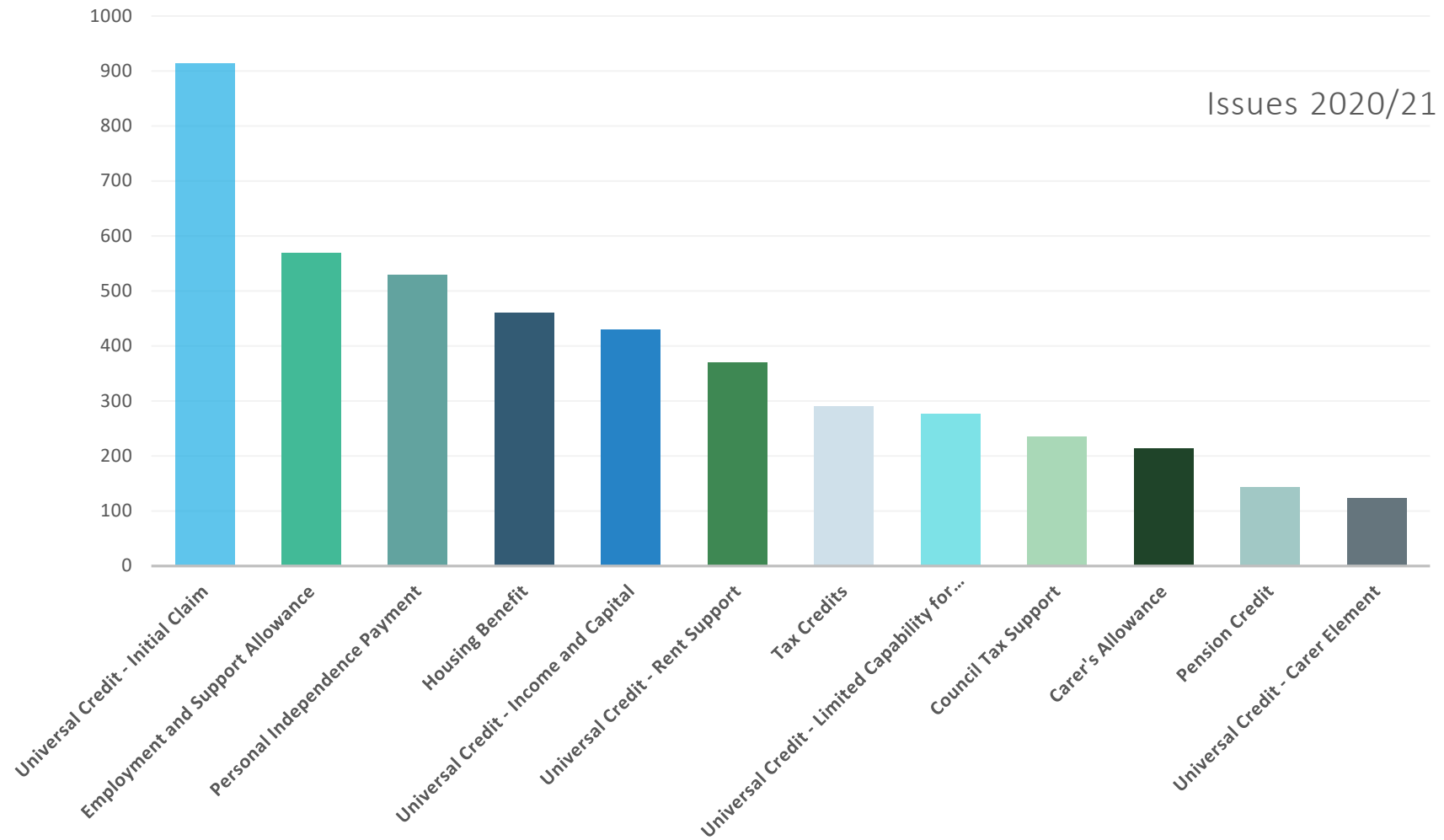
We helped those most in need - continued

We are able to capture a rich set of data from our clients. During this year 63% of all clients helped were female. 16% declared their ethnicity as non-white. The number of clients who are tenants is a far higher proportion than the general Surrey population, suggesting that social and private sector tenants disproportionately experience more problems with benefits. 44% of all clients for whom we hold data were social housing tenants, and 24% were private sector tenants.

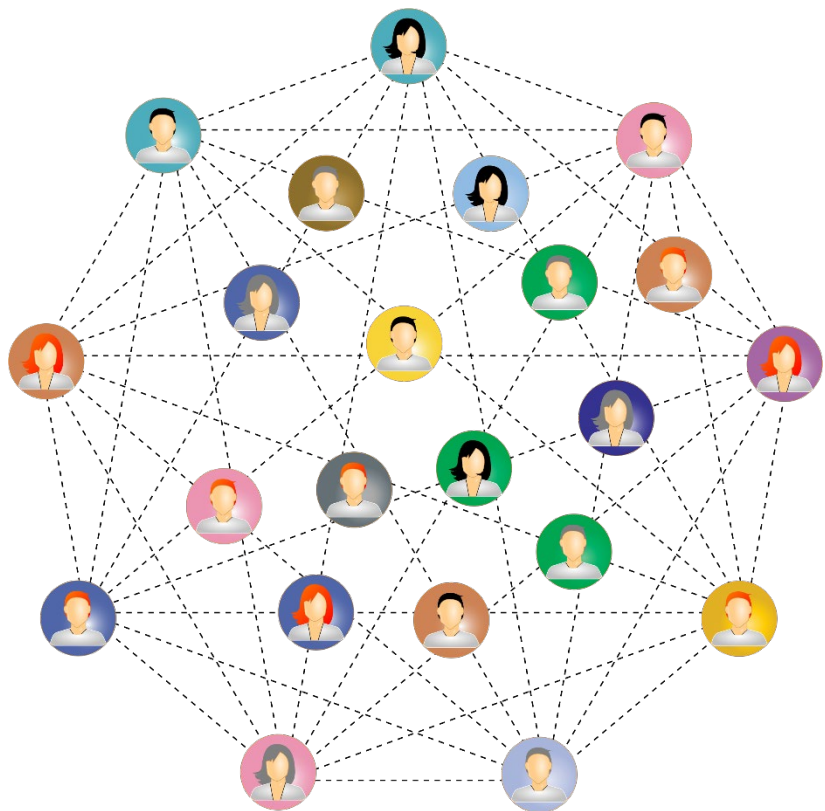
21% were unable to work due to long-term illness or disability, 15% were unemployed and 12% were unpaid Carers.



.....with these benefit problems



In total our advice had this much value



Financial Outcomes direct and indirect £3,603,935

Client benefit gain confirmed £467,730
Health, social care and other gains
£6199

Our Fiscal Benefit was £252,901

Fiscal Benefit: Avoiding cost of evictions and temporary housing, avoiding costs of unemployment, and reducing use of NHS services by resolving problems that cause stress and anxiety and depression.

Our Public Value was £2,849,858

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

Headline figures:

Reducing use of NHS £60,961

Keeping people in work £140,804

Homelessness prevention savings
£59,479

Fiscal benefit of supporting
claimants with benefit debts
£65,307

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

During 2020/21 Citizens Advice provided the Unit with funding to commission a research report on the value of our work. The independent researcher undertook interviews with key staff across a range of organisations we support. The final report provided quantitative and qualitative evidence and offered recommended improvements. When asked about the specialist support we provide, the feedback was very positive:

SWRU's guidance has always been considered high quality with succinct, concise advice provided to advisors which is easy to understand and pass on to their clients. The interviewees explained they fill a very much needed gap in expert knowledge within the local advice sector. Even the subscribers with welfare benefit experts in their teams turn to SWRU for additional guidance in some scenarios.

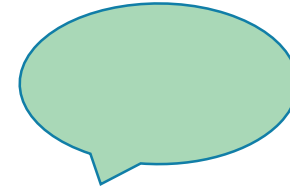
Part of a bigger picture

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 access training and get on with helping 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. These include domestic abuse charities, housing support teams, debt services and hospices. Poverty affects every corner of a person's life, not just negative impacts on physical and mental health. It stops participation, motivation, and if essential costs cannot be met, results in a spiral of debt made worse by third party recovery direct from benefits. Early action is essential. The years of welfare reforms have, in part, shifted economic risks onto the claimant. There are some safeguards that can help mitigate these risks but most of these require advice, and for vulnerable clients, support to negotiate the complexities of the welfare system.

There is a large consensus that the benefits system must be made fairer, and more generous for people living in poverty, including workers. We will be keeping a close eye on our client evidence and will press for change when needed, either at the local or national level. We look forward to working with policy makers and politicians to improve the lives of local people in receipt of benefits.

What they said.....



“Thank you all again for today’s training. It was very helpful and will help with the development of PA’s knowledge around benefits”

“Thank you so much, it is really handy to have it all written down like this, it helps me and the Carer”

“I have given my positive feedback on the form but wanted to personally thank you for organising and presenting such a good course”

“Thank you for your excellent, diligent and incredibly supportive service”

“I wanted to thank you for your guidance with this case – it was good to have your input and it helped me write the appeal grounds that appear to have been the basis of the changed decision”

“Must say the service you provide is fabulous”

Training the advice sector

SWRU courses delivered	18
Local advice workers trained	167
Commissioned courses delivered	14
Local staff and volunteers trained	252

New courses included:

- Brexit and Access to Universal Credit for EEA Nationals
- Changes in Benefit Entitlement for Mixed Age Couples
- Social Security changes in response to COVID-19
- Surplus Earnings in Universal Credit
- Severe Disability Premium - Transitional Protection



Working with others for better client outcomes

Local Citizens Advice in Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex

Action for Carers Surrey

Surrey County Council – Policy and Commissioning

Surrey Care Leavers Service

HMCTS

Jobcentre Plus

Surrey District and Borough councils

Citizens Advice –National Office

Work and Pensions Select Committee

Surrey Housing Providers Group

Carers Commissioning Strategy Group

BBC News

Department of Work and Pensions

Reigate and Banstead Council Universal Credit Forum

Public Health Surrey

Surrey Welfare Advice Group

Who we are

Staff

Brigid Caffyn-Parsons – Welfare Rights Adviser

Karen Creeth – Welfare Rights Adviser

Sarah Fell – Welfare Rights Adviser

Carol Gibbs – Senior Welfare Rights Adviser

Helen Haws – Welfare Rights Adviser

Ray Savage – Administrator

Maria Zealey – Chief Officer

We would like to thank

Surrey County Council

Surrey Clinical Commissioning Groups

Woking Borough Council

Elmbridge Borough Council

Guildford Borough Council

Celia Haws

Trustees

Anne Haigh – Chair

David Booth

Alison Cox

Jane Bourgeois

John Fairley

Roger Hurcombe

Steve O’Sullivan - Treasurer

Anne Pirie

Sophia Platts

Suja Subramanian

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.

We are a member of the Citizens Advice service.

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