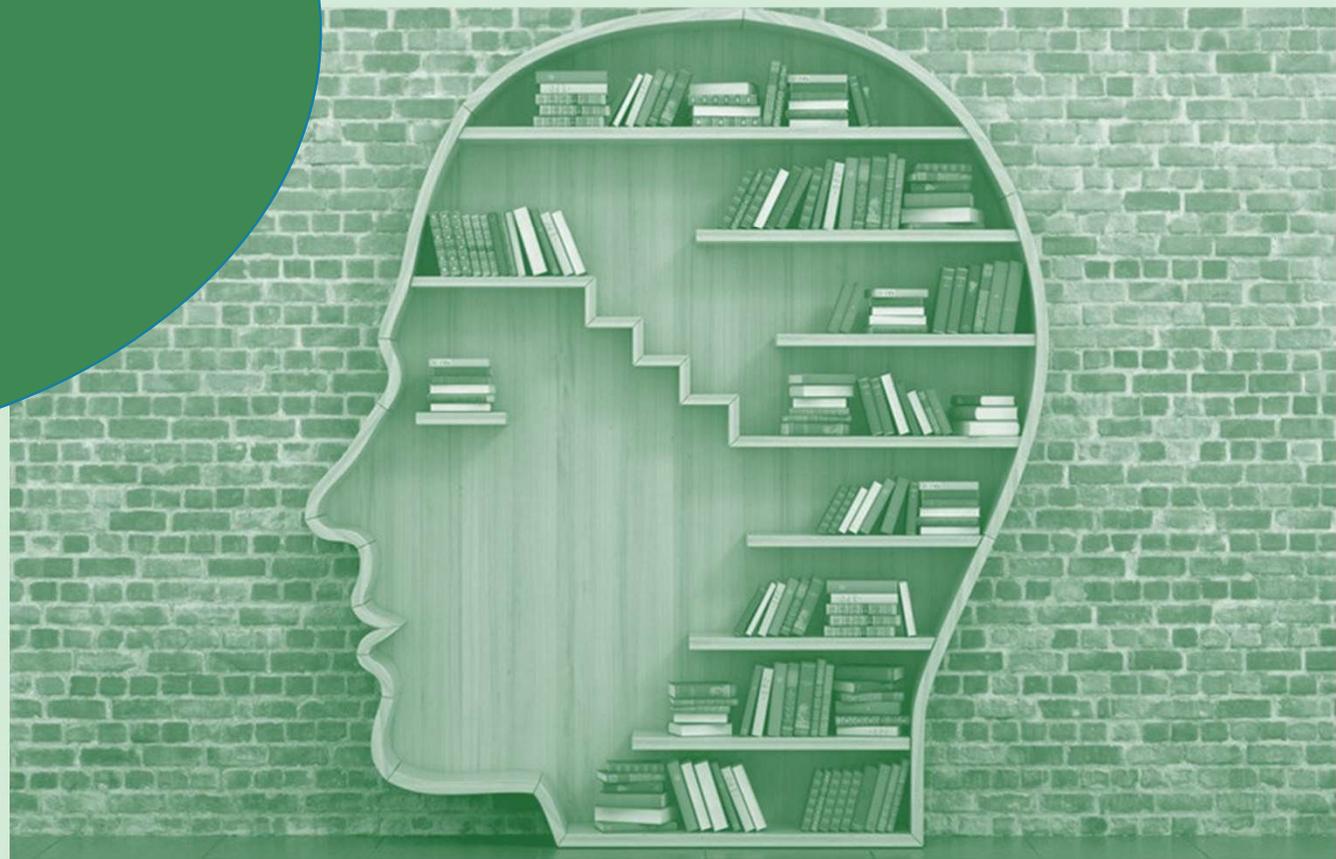


**Surrey Welfare Rights Unit
Impact Report
2021/22**



Welfare Rights

We were hoping for a more settled year compared to 2020/21 but that didn't happen. We coped with switching back and forth from office and home, but it was the pace of legislative change that kept us working flat out to ensure all our stakeholders were up to date, and aware of changes that could impact on their clients. The Covid easements on social security were removed one by one, but it was clear that what was left behind was a trail of debt, lost work, and benefit overpayments for many. At the same time the Tribunal service began to pick up pace with appeals, and medical assessments were re-started. A positive was that clients, who needed to, could once again visit advice agencies in person. The temporary uplift in Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit made such a difference to low income households, and it was extremely disappointing that, despite strong campaigning, the increase was not kept - especially with the cost of living shocks that were just round the corner. For the coming year we will be focussing on the managed migration of Universal Credit, and preparing for increased casework clients, including appeals.



A few words from the Trustee Board

It has been a privilege to take over as Chair of Surrey Welfare Rights Unit after many years of association with the Unit both as Trustee and service user. Whilst Anne Haigh stood down as Chair during the year we are delighted that she continues as a Trustee. We said farewell to Alison Cox, Trustee for over 25 years and to Sophia Platts. Thanks to them both for the contribution they made during their trusteeship. We welcome two new Trustees to the Board, Dani Jordan and Keith O'Neill.

The Board continues to be impressed by the outstanding service offered by our staff under the very able leadership of our Chief Officer, Maria Zealey. This has been evidenced this year by our full quality assessment by Citizens Advice where we scored highly in all areas which include governance and quality of advice as well as the high levels of satisfaction in feedback from our service users.

This has been another difficult year with a couple of false starts in returning to work in the office but we are pleased that our staff have now successfully adopted a hybrid method of working. A rare positive from the pandemic has been the opportunity to develop new ways of working which will continue with us post pandemic.

The details in this report demonstrate the continued high level of need. With the high increase in the cost of living and pressures on household incomes we expect demand on our service to increase.

On behalf of the Board I should like to thank all our funders, staff and fellow Trustees for their continued support during the year.

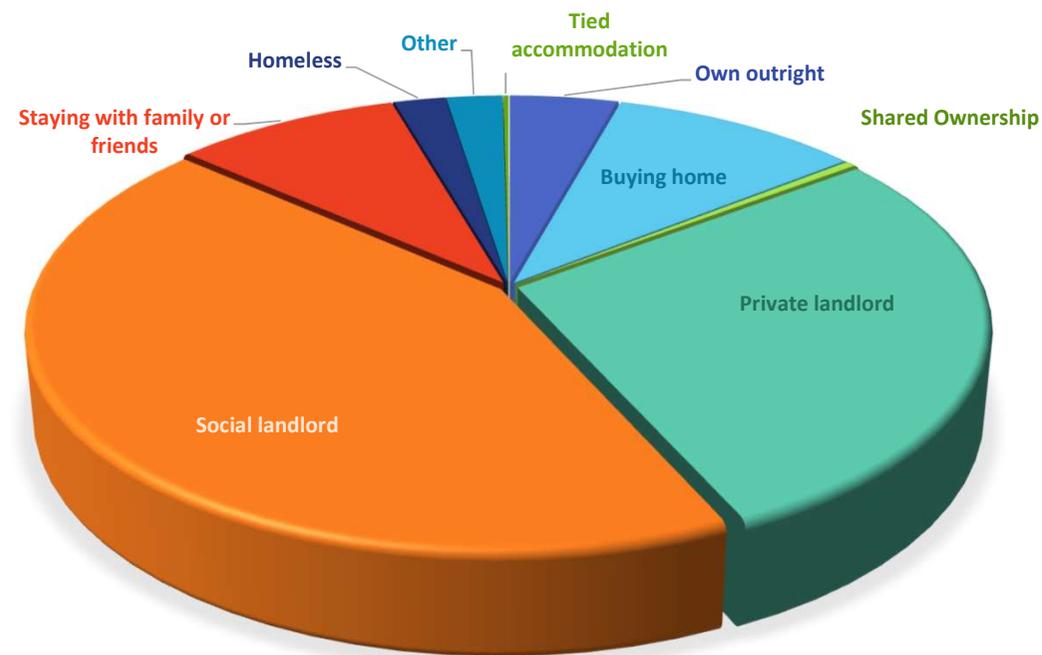
Jane Bourgeois Trustee Board Chair

We helped those most in need

Housing status is only one of many data sets we record about the households we have supported throughout the year. Compared to last year's figures, we saw an increase in clients who were staying with family or friends, rather than having their own accommodation. There was also a jump in the number of renters who had a private sector landlord. Both reflect two of the most insecure household types.

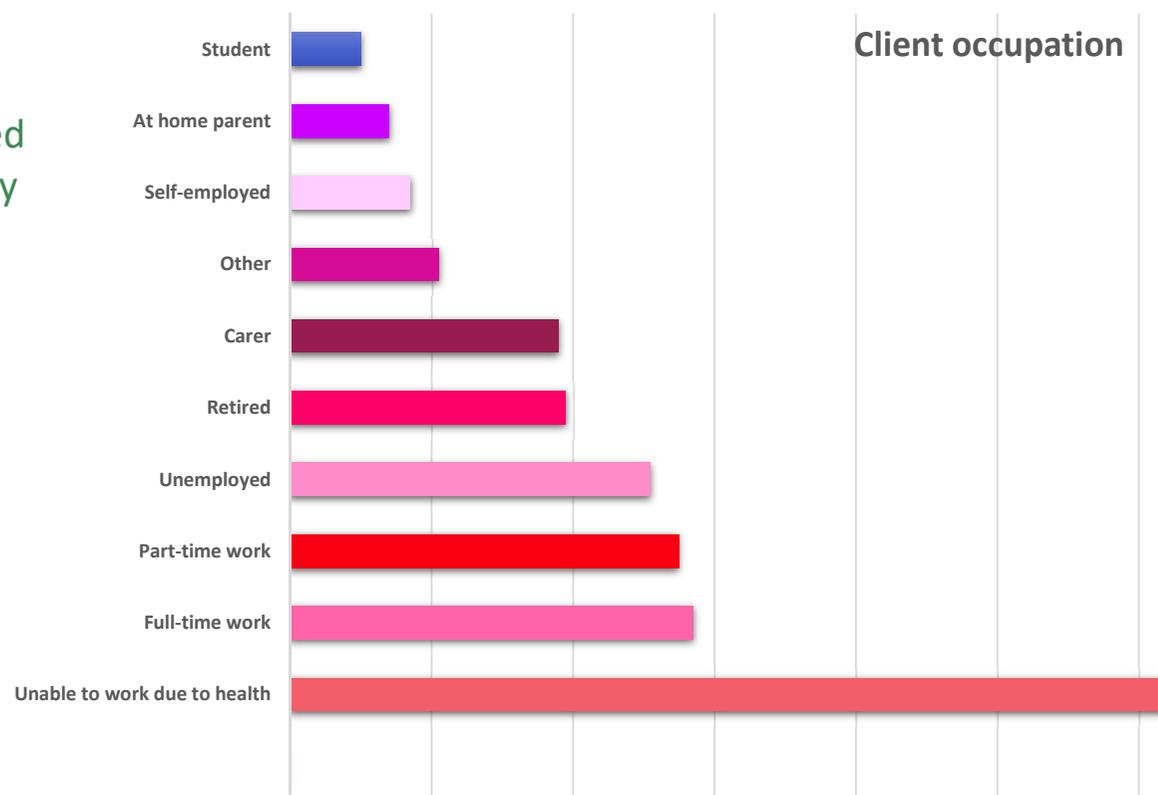
We have been reporting on the difficulty some students have in accessing benefits, particularly disabled students, and this is reflected in our Education related enquiries which increased by 130%.

Similar to last year, 63% of all clients helped were female. The percentage of clients who were disabled or long-term ill increased significantly from 57% to 66%. 29% of our clients stated that they were not White British.



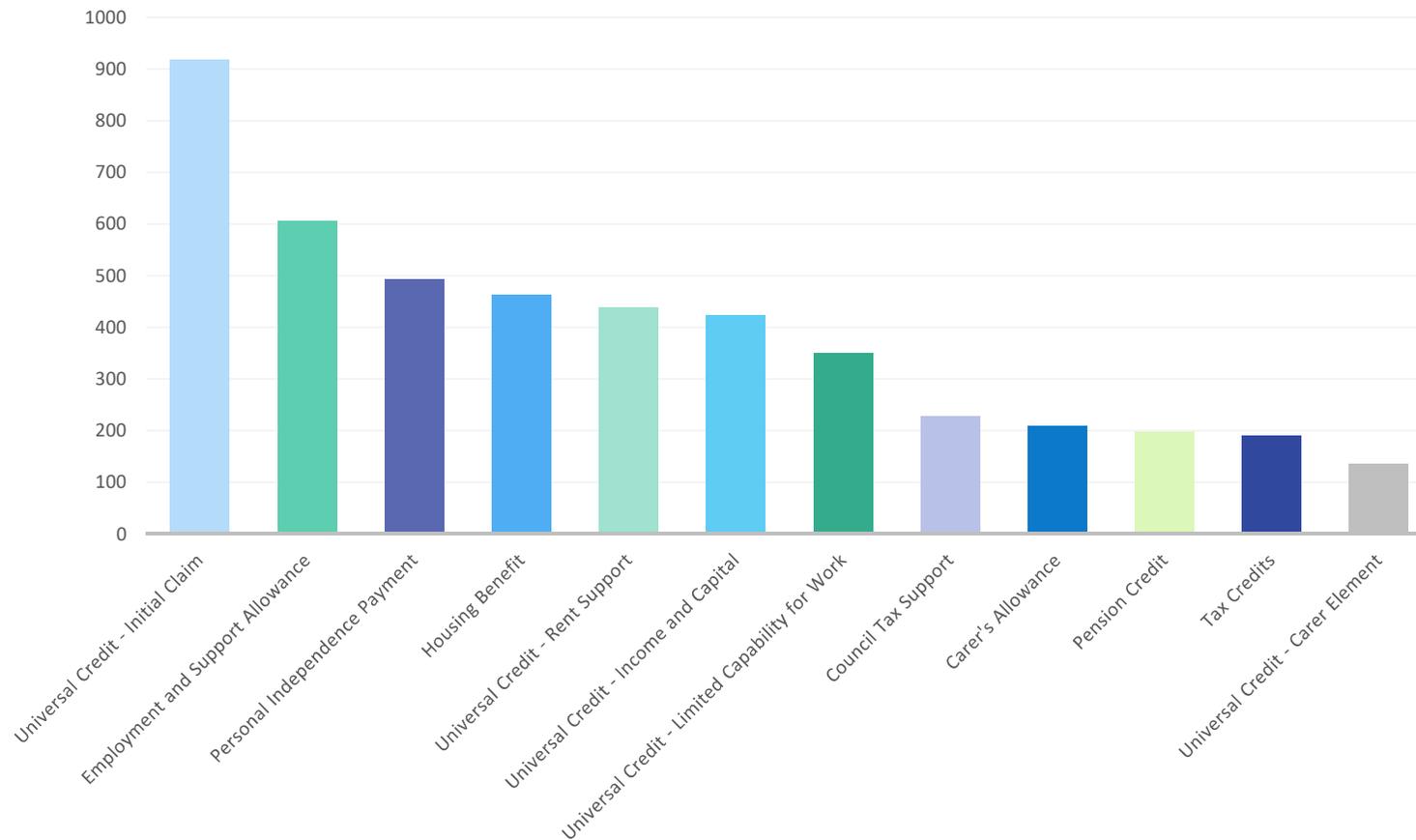
We helped those most in need - continued

Enquiries relating to overpayments of benefits and other related debts rose by 80% compared to the previous year. Other noticeable changes were Housing Benefit queries that concerned mixed-aged couples. The 125% increase reflects the complexity of the law on this issue. We saw a 70% rise in queries about the mobility component of child Disability Living Allowance. Enquiries about the past presence or residence tests and how they apply to disability and Carer benefits were up in every category. How to access Universal Credit if you have pre-settled status queries increased by 118%. Challenges to Universal Credit decisions were over 200% higher for this year, both mandatory reconsiderations and appeals.

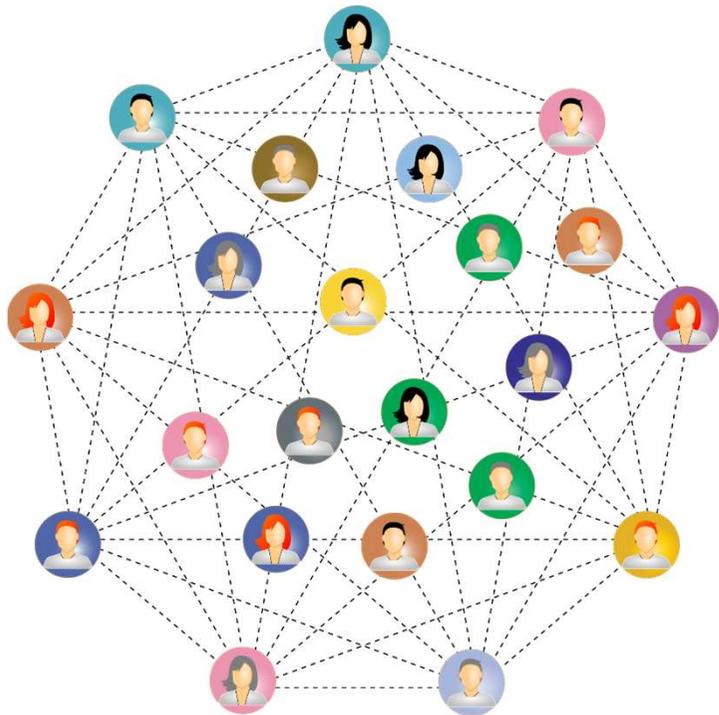


.....with these benefit problems

Issues 2021/22



In total our advice had this much value



Financial Outcomes direct and indirect £3,064,847

Client benefit gain confirmed £430,025
Health, social care and other gains
£6518

Our Fiscal Benefit was £303,999

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 £2,509,755

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

Headline figures:

Reducing use of NHS £73,389

Keeping people in work £126,769

Homelessness prevention savings
£103,736

Fiscal benefit of supporting claimants
with benefit debts £115,119

**For every £1 of funding we
received our clients gained
£20.32 and we created £18.16
of public value**

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

In addition to our financial outcomes we also try to record non-financial outcomes such as blue badges or a social care assessment, as well as “soft” outcomes such as client reporting improved health, or resolution of a complaint.

The value of e-training is difficult to quantify. However, the more volunteers and staff are supported and have access to training, the more likely it is that they are satisfied at work, and will remain at the organisation. Each adviser that we train and support could, in turn, help hundreds more local residents.

Our research and campaigning work is equally important as helping individuals resolve their benefit problems. The value of this work is when we successfully raise an issue with key parliamentarians or decision-makers, and see changes happen that help those struggling to navigate the social security maze.



Sharing Best Practice and Active Campaigning with Citizens Advice in Surrey

In December 2020 we set up a quarterly meeting to enable welfare rights colleagues across the Surrey Local Citizens Advice network to meet to discuss issues impacting their clients and affecting their ability to deliver accurate, tailored, effective and timely advice. Since then, 46 colleagues from 9 Local Citizens Advice districts have attended the Surrey Welfare Advice Group.

The topics discussed have been varied and include

- Immigration status and access to benefits
- The DWP's Trust and Protect initiative
- Access to Universal Credit for disabled students
- The lack of transparency around deductions from Universal Credit
- The DWP's refusal to accept ongoing authority to act on behalf of clients.

As a group, we have been in touch with Chloe Smith, Minister for Disabled People to determine the processes around supersessions of Personal Independence Payments for claimants diagnosed with a terminal illness. We are currently looking at the inaccurate and misleading content of some letters from the DWP and are in discussion with the Department about improvement.

Karen Creeth, SWRU Adviser and Surrey Welfare Advice Group Lead

What they said.....



" She has specifically asked me to give you a big thank you for all the help you have given her" - Casework client's support worker

"Its made me very aware of the gaps in my knowledge (which is a good thing)" - Training delegate

"Thank you so much for this morning's training session. I found it really informative and easy to follow. I will definitely be back for more" - Training delegate, Charity Worker

"The team really appreciated your presentation and have asked me to pass on their thanks for the wonderful job your team does" - Surrey employment support service

"I emailed SWRU for some advice late last night. Phone call back from them first thing with a plan. We are so lucky to have such a brilliant and responsive local charity" - Surrey charity

"All the advisers are brilliant. I don't think I could do my job without their advice" - User Survey

" We sent a colleague on your PIP courses last year and they were very effective (our Adviser has been very successful with MRs, obtaining arrears of nearly £8,000 for at least 2 clients recently)" - Local Citizens Advice



Training the advice sector

SWRU courses delivered	27
Local advice workers trained	174

Commissioned courses delivered	23
Local staff and volunteers trained	414

New courses included:

- Universal Credit calculations
- Understanding earnings and Universal Credit
- PIP – the Mobility Component
- Benefits Overview for non-advisers

We ran almost twice the number of courses during this year, responding to both rising demand for training, and rapid changes in social security legislation.



Delivering e-training

SWRU has always had a reputation for delivering well-received face-to-face (F2F) training but, when the pandemic hit in 2020, it was necessary to find a different way to deliver it. We developed an e-training format, with one adviser presenting whilst a second adviser used the chat bar to provide additional information or answer questions from delegates without interrupting the presentation. In addition, technical support would be available to resolve problems such as joining the meeting and sound issues. 2020/21 saw us launching the new courses and, responding to feedback from the delegates, improvements were made where necessary.

2021/22 was our first full year of e-training delivery and the response from the delegates has been amazing. Initially, we were apprehensive about whether the delegates would take to e-training but many have emphasised the benefits of not having to travel to a venue, saving both money and time, as well as the extremely important reduced carbon footprint. They were also complimentary about the format with the chat function as well as the relaxed and friendly manner of the training team. We have also been confident enough to increase the number of delegates attending each course without impacting each delegate's experience. What started out as a temporary solution until we could return to F2F training has now become a permanent addition to the services we offer. There will still be courses though where F2F is desirable and, when conditions allow, we will reintroduce them.

Another benefit of the e-training is that we are no longer limited to the geographical constraints of F2F training and have been promoting the service further afield, concentrating on organisations in rural areas that, when the pandemic was over, would still benefit from remote training. In 2021/22, delegates have joined our courses from as far as Lancashire in the north and the Isle of Wight in the south. Most of our training is still for organisations in Surrey though, and we rounded the year off by successfully delivering 5 courses to staff from Surrey County Council's Contact Centre.

Working with others for better client outcomes

Local Citizens Advice in Surrey,
Hampshire, Merton and Lambeth 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

House of Lords – Youth
Unemployment Committee

Surrey Choices

BBC News Surrey

Department of Work and
Pensions

Public Health Surrey

Surrey Welfare Advice Group

Social Security Advisory
Committee

Surrey County Council Contact
Centre

Who we are

Staff

Maria Zealey – Chief Officer

Brigid Caffyn-Parsons – Welfare Rights Adviser

Karen Creeth – Welfare Rights Adviser

Sarah Fell – Welfare Rights Adviser

Carol Gibbs – Senior Welfare Rights Adviser

Lou Glencross – Parent and Carer Benefits Adviser

Helen Haws – Welfare Rights Adviser

Ray Savage – Administrator

We would like to thank

Surrey County Council

Surrey NHS groups

Woking Borough Council

Elmbridge Borough Council

Guildford Borough Council

Reigate Borough Council

The National Lottery

Trustees

Jane Bourgeois - Chair

Anne Haigh

John Fairley

Roger Hurcombe

Steve O’Sullivan - Treasurer

Anne Pirie

Suja Subramanian

Dani Jordan

Keith O’Neill

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