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# Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice Research and Campaigns Newsletter July 18

This is our first Research and Campaigns (R&C) newsletters for local partners in Arun & Chichester. We're a small team, but we work right across our service to achieve change in policy to benefit our clients.

## What is Research & Campaigns?

Our service holds a huge amount of insight and data about the problems our clients and their wider communities face. We use this to do several things:

- To help us research issues further
- To influence decision makers to change policies and practices
- To campaign to get decision makers to change policies and Practices

## How we use data and insight.

Our local advice centres analyse the needs and issues our clients are facing, and are able to identify when policies or practices become unfair.

The evidence we collate provides information not only to our local authorities but also nationally to Citizens Advice. It is this vital information that is used to support any long term policy changes.

Any evidence we gather is used anonymously.



Registered charity 1099640

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## **Our Evidence in Action – Recent Policy Changes**

### **Housing:**

On 19 January the 'Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards Bill' received its second reading in parliament.

We asked our MPs to support the second reading. This is a significant step to strengthening tenant's rights and to protect renters living in unsafe homes, both privately rented or social housing. The reasons that this law is so important are:

- 1. 8.4 million tenants will be safer**
- 2. The law won't negatively affect good landlords**
- 3. A wider range of health and safety issues will be covered**
- 4. It will simplify health and safety regulation in housing**
- 5. It empowers tenants to enforce property standards**

The law will be updated to include all of the hazards local authorities look out for under the Housing Act 2004. This means all tenants can fall back on the law for protection against a wider range of health and safety hazards in their homes, such as fire safety. At the moment, they rely on the local authority for enforcement action on some health and safety issues. Where landlords own the whole building, they will be responsible for ensuring that it is fit for human habitation.

**The Homelessness Reduction Act** became law on 3 April 18. This makes amendments to the Housing Act 1996. It will give local Housing Authorities greater responsibility towards people that are either homeless or threatened with homelessness.

We will be monitoring the implementation of this in Arun and Chichester.

### **Benefits**

Universal Credit changes have come about due to the pressure government was put under by Citizens Advice.

Esther McVey MP (Minister) announced in February not to appeal the court decision on higher PIP mobility for those with mental health conditions. She has also announced a consultation on widening the criteria for blue badge awards for those with hidden disabilities. This will provide a life line to those affected and may even enable them to return to work.

In February the Work and Pensions Select committee report on PIP and ESA Assessments stated that 'a trust deficit fails claimants and the 'public purse'. Their recommendations' are very similar to our report - Get The Award Right First time - which we shared with our local MPs in November 2016.

## **Postal Survey – Disabled Access**

In January several clients participated in a survey about disabled people using the postal and parcel delivery services. We discovered that the researchers didn't realise that if you are in a wheelchair and are unable to stand you cannot post a letter as the opening is too high.

13 million people in the UK have a disability and they all have their own unique experiences and needs. Postal services are highly valued and frequently used by disabled people. The report looks at each stage of a customer's journey, from ordering online and home delivery to collecting, posting or returning parcels at an access point. It considers what's important to disabled people at each stage and outlines findings on how well postal services are meeting their needs. It finds that there are clear areas that retailers, parcel operators and postal access points must focus on to improve the experience of disabled consumers.

The report can be accessed at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/post-policy-research-and-consultation-responses/post-policy-research/the-customer-journey-disabled-peoples-access-to-postal-services/>

## **Campaigns**

### **Scams month this year was held in June:**

During Scams Awareness Month - **Don't miss a trick - Be scam aware**, we have been extremely active whether it is running events at local supermarkets where we spoke to over 400 people, extensive social media coverage through Twitter/Facebook, six different press articles in the local media, radio interview on Spirit FM and of course for the first time a true partnership with the West Sussex Mobile Library Service from Bognor Library which stops at over 60 stops from Findon in the east, to Northchapel north of Petworth and Thorney Island to the west. The public continue to be concerned about Internet Scams and uninvited nuisance calls and to that extent we have taken this as a call to action and in partnership with West Sussex Community Safety and Wellbeing Service we are running an event on the 20th September. We will provide hints, tips and possibly tools for voluntary organisations such as the Community Transport teams to take the message to the vulnerable people they support to help avoid scams in the future. More exciting news to come on this event.

## **Current Work**

We are continuing to monitor Universal Credit, PIP and ESA. We are also looking at Housing Association rents and service charges as well as disrepair.

### **Evidence gathering underpins our Research and Campaigns work.**

Here is an example of evidence our service collects on a daily bases. This client is a 60 year old lady who was not given a refund by a High Street jewellers for a faulty ring when a replacement wasn't available.

**Key phrase:** Faulty goods and statutory rights

**What is the impact of the problem?** The client returned a ring because a stone fell out - she returned it within 6 months. The Jeweller no longer stocked the same ring and said that she would have to choose a replacement because that was company policy. The ring most similar was £11 cheaper and the shop said they would not refund the difference. The staff did not appear to be knowledgeable about statutory rights under consumer legislation. They only quoted company policy which appeared to allow replacement if the consumer was dissatisfied with their purchase for any reason. i.e. the policy may be generous in many situations but falls short of statutory obligations for faulty goods. Under Consumer Rights Act 2015, Consumer Protection (Amendment) Regulations 2014 she would have been entitled to a full refund.

If you want to know more about our research and campaigns work we would really like to hear from you. We value your input. You contact the team on [campaigns@arunchichestercab.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@arunchichestercab.org.uk).

Website—[www.arunchichestercab.org.uk](http://www.arunchichestercab.org.uk)

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