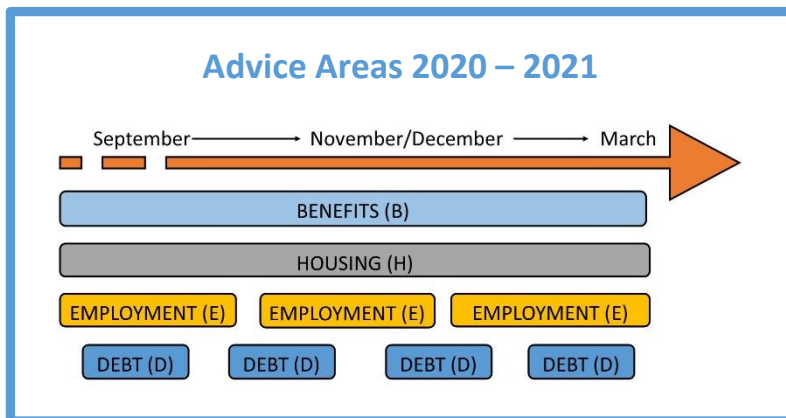


Introduction

You are receiving this update because we wanted to bring awareness of specific advice areas that are relevant and emerging throughout Bromley and specific local wards. This document is a summary of quantitative statistics with qualitative comment demonstrating current emerging issues in this phase of the pandemic. In this edition we will focus on **Welfare Benefits**. We are providing this as an aid to enable focused decisions to be made in areas of need, both geographically and socially.

1. Advice Areas



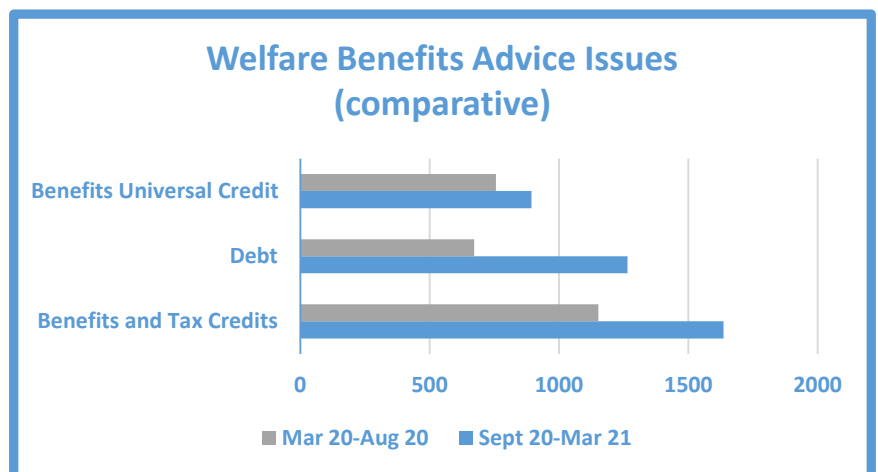
September 2020 onwards showed a sustained need for Benefits Advice. Since the rush for initial claims March/April/June 2020 issues are now focused around health related benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP: A disability benefit) applications, mandatory reconsiderations and appeals. Universal credit's disability element is not always being received potentially due to the period of no face to face assessments. Supporting clients at tribunal continues and this regularly goes in favour of the clients. Housing advice focuses on disrepair and out of borough accommodation.

Employment is steady but quieter than initially. However, the team feel this will pick up as more employers open and refusal to furlough and working conditions are looked at; clients balancing working from home and the office. Debt Advice remains a great need and this is an area of advice that will only increase as the impact of Covid-19 is felt in the following months and years.

2. Key Statistics 01.09.2020 - 31.03.2021

Table 1.0 opposite shows key demographic data comparing March – August 20 and September – March 21. This focuses on Welfare Benefits and related issues specifically Debt.

As you will see Benefits Universal Credit has remained high with 894 Issues related to 299 Clients previously 756 and 280 respectively. With respect to General Benefits and Tax credit enquiries these have jumped dramatically from 1152 to 1636 issues reported from 370 to 516 clients in this recent period.

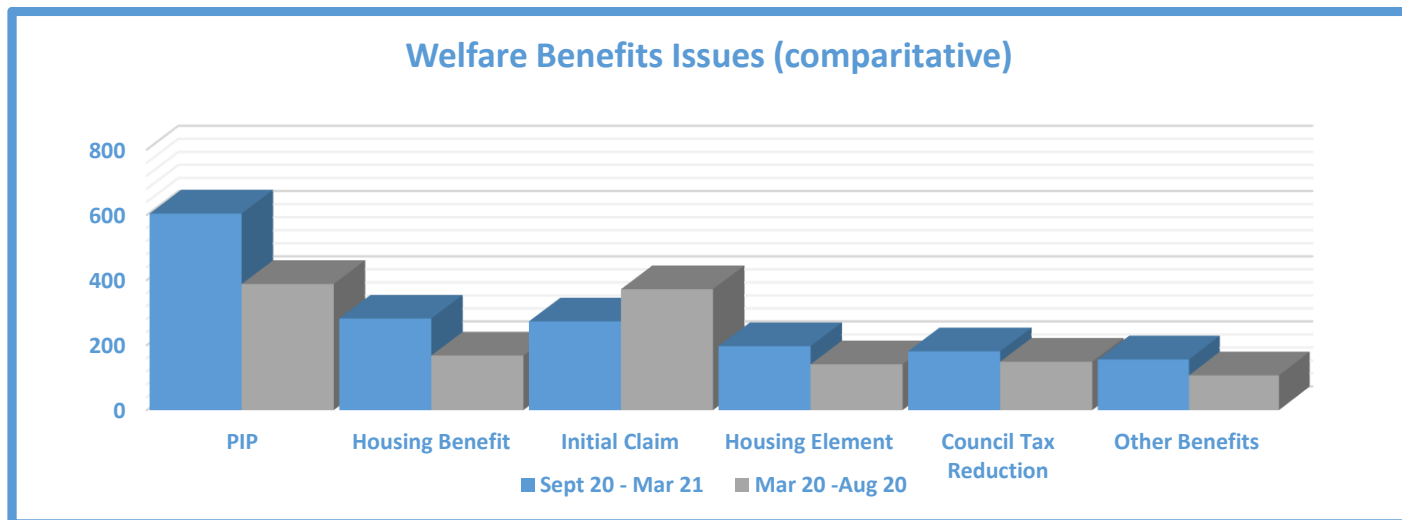


3. Case Study

The client was referred to Citizens Advice Bromley's benefits team as his Personal Independence Payment (PIP) award had ended, and his Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) payment reduced, due to the loss of his Severe disability premium (SDP). We supported them to request a mandatory reconsideration and then appeal this when unsuccessful. Assisting them with budgeting, to manage their reduced income. Furthermore, assisting them to apply for a Warm Home discount, Thames Water Help, and Thames Water Trust Fund to reduce debts. Foodbank vouchers were issued whilst awaiting these outcomes. Finally, the client was referred to Bromley Mencap for specialist support. The outcomes were the client's mental wellbeing was improved, as was their ability to manage their finances. The appeal was successful and the enhanced rate of both the daily living and mobility

elements of PIP were awarded. These were backdated to September 2018, to run for 6 years – £47,236. The client’s SDP was also reinstated, giving the client a further £20,888 both over the course of the award.

In Top Welfare Benefit Issues Table 2.0 below, PIP issues continue to be the highest rising from 388 to 604. Housing benefit and Initial Claim are at 282 and 273. However, Initial claim has lowered significantly since 2020 from 372, which we put down to the initial application for benefits following negative employment effects such as reduced hours, dismissal and confusion around eligibility.



4. Local Impact in Bromley by Ward 01.09.2020 - 31.03.2021

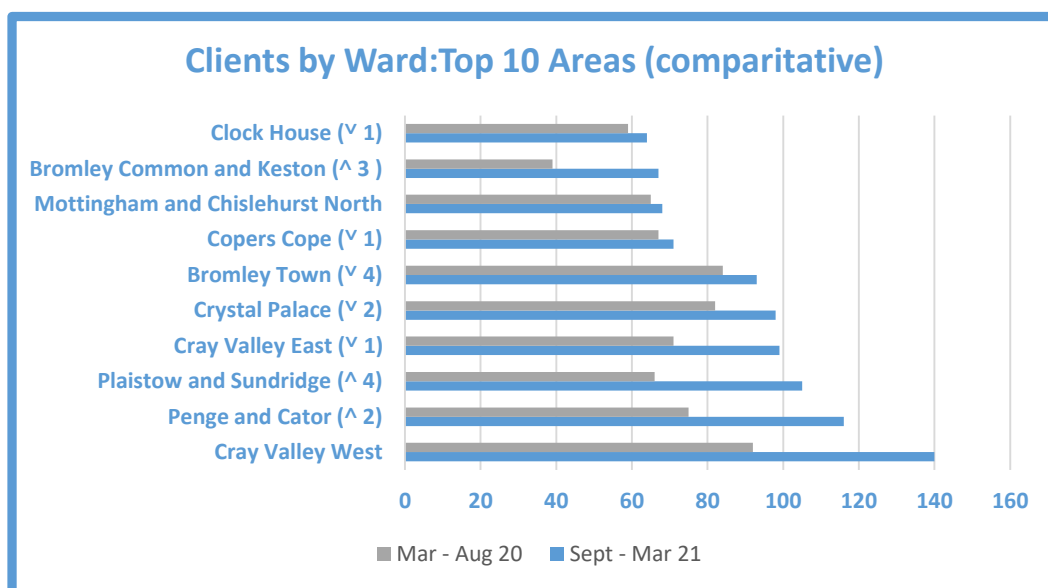


Table 3.0 opposite shows Clients by ward, Cray Valley West being the highest. We have seen a significant increase in clients from Bromley Common & Keston, Plaistow & Sundridge and Penge & Cator. Potential influencing factors are: closed face to face services affecting residents who prefer a face to face service for personal or health reasons, new clients demographics include the

self-employed and/or movement of clients around or into the borough to more affordable areas.

5. Outcomes (Specific to benefits)

Income gain	£545,668
Reimbursement	£18,707
Debts written off	£24,371
Repayments scheduled at	£416
TOTAL	£589,162

The financial outcomes recorded are reflective of mixture of specific Welfare Benefits outcomes including but not limited to Income Gain (Tax Credit: new award, revision, repayment, overpayment and Universal Credit claims submitted), as well as general benefits entitlement, grant awards and compensation.

6. Contact Citizens Advice Bromley at: researchandcampaigns@citizensadvicebromley.org.uk