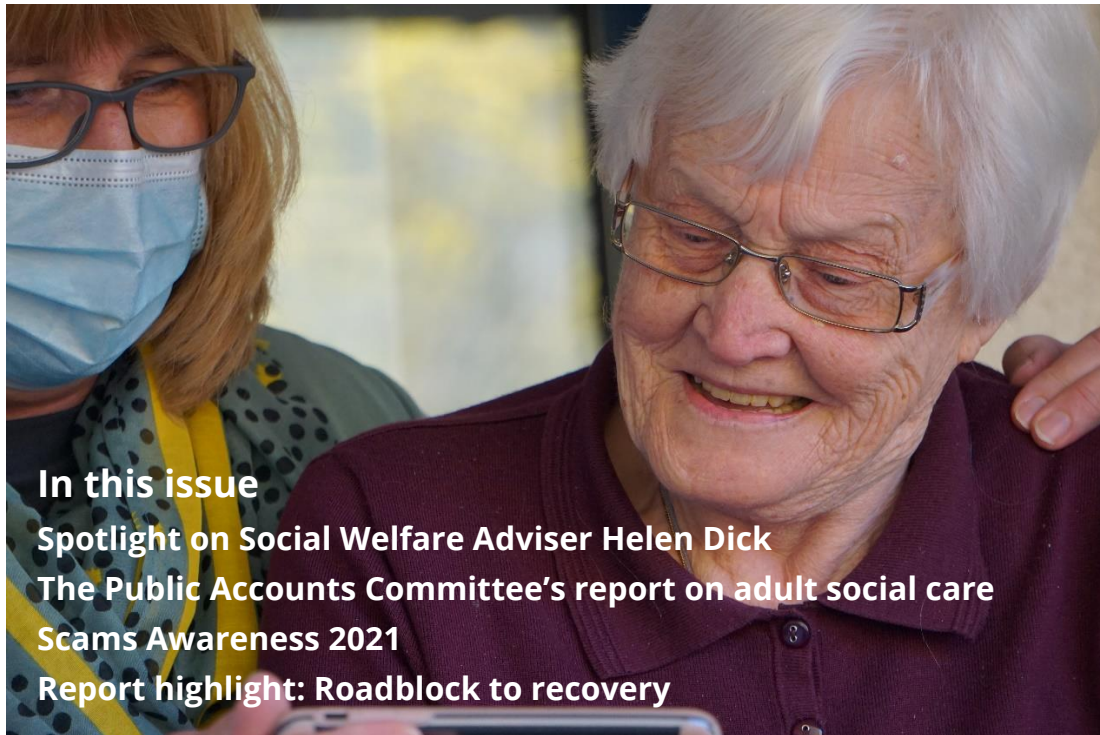


Gateshead Investigates Bulletin Summer 2021



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Welcome to Gateshead Investigates Bulletin: Summer 2021

In this bulletin you will find information on the research and campaigning activity of staff and volunteers of Citizens Advice Gateshead.

We are pleased to welcome Caitlin McIsaac to the R&C team. Caitlin has been working with us alongside her work as a Financial Inclusion Adviser at Citizens Advice Gateshead and has really hit the ground running, helping with our project investigating local issues with adult social care following on from our report to Parliament mentioned in our Spring 2021 bulletin.

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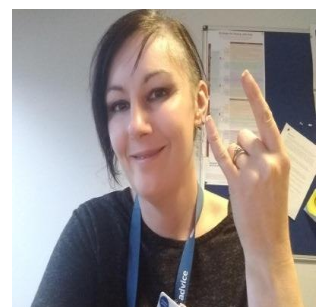
Alex Egan, Research and Campaigns Coordinator
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Spotlight: Helen Dick rocks the system



Research and campaigns work at Citizens Advice Gateshead would be impossible without our advisers. Every time they help someone who seeks our advice they're on the look out for underlying causes for their problem. Much of the time a person simply needs advice about their options, their benefits entitlement for example. But often our advisers see someone whose issues have come about due to unfair policies that govern a service, or poor practices by those meant to be enacting good policies.

This bulletin we'd like to highlight **Social Welfare Adviser Helen Dick**, who has stood up for equality and made sure an obstructive policy at Durham Council was changed for the better.





Helen works with our Great North Children's Hospital outreach programme - direct access to welfare advice.

Through her work she noticed an obstructive policy at Durham Council, which contrasted with other local authorities. The policy in question related to their Blue Badge scheme, and prevented Helen from submitting a "DS1500" form, which features medical evidence allowing a fast-track application – the form is for terminally ill patients. In several cases Helen has submitted these forms, after completion by a health professional, to local authorities in the region on behalf of families with terminally ill children. However, Durham Council's policy stated that only a medical professional could submit the form, which presented an arbitrary barrier to Helen supporting the family with their application. With assistance from R&C Coordinator Alex Egan, Helen wrote to Durham Council to explain the difficulty and suggest a policy change. They recognised our insight into the issue from front-line experience, and agreed to change the policy. A success in influencing commissioned services until they meet people's needs!

The Public Accounts Committee's report on adult social care



Last bulletin we told you about how we took an opportunity to raise our concerns to a Parliamentary committee's inquiry about long-standing issues with adult social care provision. The committee's report was published on the 16th of June 2021.



Summarising the report, the committee said "The current system does not work for local authorities or those paying for their own care. Funding cuts have meant that most local authorities pay providers below the costs of care. This has led to many

providers living hand to mouth, unable to make long-term decisions which would improve care services. While information about care quality is available, there is a lack of transparency about what people or local authorities get for the money they spend. The Department of Health and Social Care (the Department) has poor oversight of the system and seems complacent about the risks of local market failure."

Meg Hillier MP, Chair of the Committee said "Carers, younger and older adults needing care, and home care have seen decades of neglect, and the 1.5 million who work in care deserve much better. The reforms to address this now must include a long-term funding plan that allows local authorities and providers to innovate and improve services. We cannot afford more broken commitments on care."

We are pleased to see that several of the recommendations the report makes for change would address the problems we've seen our clients facing locally.

Our evidence, which we submitted to the committee, detailed cases of people struggling to access care, with some experiencing **severe delays to care needs assessments** due to under resourcing of the system. The committee's recommendation that the care workforce be boosted in number and also in skills, training and development, will improve this issue.

Our evidence also showed that many **struggle to understand** what care is available, how they will pay for their care, and what support they might be entitled to towards these costs. The committee's recommendation that all providers should give clear and comparable information over fee levels and a breakdown of how this money is spent, for example by accommodation, workforce, debt interest and profit will help address this problem.

Tacking local issues

While the report's recommendation addresses many of the problems our clients have, there are some more locally specific issues identified by our advisers not covered. The R&C team are currently investigating these further and intend to share our findings with Gateshead Council's Joint Health and Wellbeing Board – who oversee and coordinate local NHS, social care and public health services.

You can read the full Public Accounts Committee's report [here](#).

Report highlight: Roadblock to recovery - How the rules in Universal Credit are creating barriers to work

Debby Nuga, research & campaigns volunteer



Citizens Advice have published a report which discusses how some rules within Universal Credit could undermine efforts by the government to help people get back into work beyond the pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a tremendous effect on the employment field - 740,000 people lost their jobs and a record high number of 2.6 million people have claimed out-of-work benefits, which is the highest number of claims in over 25 years.

While Universal Credit can help some people re-enter the labour market, for others this is not the case. Single, disabled people and younger people are among those that find it harder to re-enter the workforce. These groups are at a higher risk of remaining unemployed due to the rules of Universal Credit not fitting with the circumstances of their lives.

- A fifth of parents entitled to Universal Credit note that their ability to find work is limited by their caring responsibilities. Upfront costs can make it difficult for single parents to access childcare. 1 in 3 unemployed single parents have been looking for work for over a year.
- 52% of disabled people entitled to Universal Credit find it harder to find work because of their disability or ill health.
- Younger people were 5 times more likely to lose their job at the start of the pandemic compared to other working age groups.

Most unemployed people surveyed believe that they would be unable to find work in a reasonable amount of time. For many, the longer they stay unemployed the harder it might be for them to move back to work. Those unemployed for 12 months or longer were more than 2 times less likely to move into employment compared to those unemployed for less than 3 months.

In order to reduce the prospect of a long-term unemployment crisis and to move people into sustainable employment, it is important that the Government take steps which include, but are not limited to, amending the rules of Universal Credit.

For the rules of Universal Credit to better fit with people's lives and to help them re-enter the work force, Citizens Advice recommend that the DWP should:

- Pay childcare costs within Universal Credit in advance - either to parents or directly to childcare providers.
- Widen access to the work allowance for disabled people in receipt of Personal Independence Payment.
- Regularly review how claimant commitments are set by work coaches to ensure work-related requirements are tailored to people's circumstances.

You can read Citizens Advice's full report [here](#).

Scams Awareness 2021



Scams Awareness Fortnight 2021 ran from the 14th to the 27th of June. This annual campaign is all about creating a network of confident, #ScamAware consumers who are able to recognise a scam, report it to the appropriate agency and talk about their experiences to help raise public awareness of scams.

Be #ScamAware

We've seen evidence that scammers are exploiting the pressures that the pandemic is putting people under, including a **significant increase in the number of scams relating to financial services** reported in the past year. These can include fake "Get Rich Quick" investment schemes or someone pretending to be your bank to get you to transfer money or personal details.

We played our part in this national campaign by communicating our key messages on our website, with both an [article](#) and an informative [video](#) by Consumer Adviser Wayne on the first three things to do if you suspect a scam - a big thank you to Wayne for this.



The First Three Things ... to do if you think you've been scammed

Anyone can fall victim to a scam. People of all ages and backgrounds get scammed, including those younger and more "tech savvy". In December 2020 research by the [Communications Consumer Panel](#) found that younger age groups (16-34 year olds) were the most susceptible to being scammed and accounted for over half of all the scams experienced (52%). One in five (20%) of those aged 16-34 had

been scammed in the past two years, compared with one in twenty-five (4%) of those aged 55+.

With this in mind, we prepared a partner briefing - with our key messages alongside general scams information and advice - which we disseminated to local youth groups and other organisations we work with. We hoped to get as many people of all ages and backgrounds talking about scams as possible.

If you think someone might be trying to scam you or someone you know, it's important to act straight away. *If you need advice and support you can call the Citizens Advice consumer service on 0808 223 1133 or visit the [Citizens Advice website](#). You should also report scams or suspected scams to Action Fraud.*