



A New Year Message from Elaine Parr, District Manager

On behalf of the whole team at Citizens Advice Reigate & Banstead I want to wish our clients, funders and community partners a very happy and successful 2018.

A demanding year.

In the past year we have helped people with a huge range of problems. The biggest area of concern has been welfare benefits, particularly Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payment. Benefit payment issues all too often have knock-on effects for clients. For instance, debt problems are created (or increase), leading to housing difficulties. The escalating pressure causes health problems which increase demand on local GPs and, in severe cases, A&E at East Surrey Hospital.

We are pleased to see support improving for people facing a mental health crisis. However much of the help is online and severely distressed clients often can't manage the digital tools. Many who attend our offices are there simply because they need personalised support, even if for just a short time. Face-to-face support at a time of crisis is a necessity not a luxury.

A big thank you to all our volunteers and funders.

Our volunteer advisers are a lifeline for many of these clients who don't have the support of family and friends. Without us they would have no avenue of support but their GPs. The sincere cards and thanks we get throughout the year show what a wonderful role our volunteers undertake.

We in turn rely on the support of volunteers in other charities, such as **Stripey Stork**, **East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service**, **Age Concern** and **Live at Home**. Our borough **Foodbanks** also play a major part – without their sterling work many of our clients would be tipped into some difficult, even dangerous, situations and we are very grateful for all they do. **St Matthews**, **Redhill** deserves a special mention for the scale of demand for support they have been facing. They have even provided lunches for children in the school holidays, which eased the extra pressure on families when schools are closed.

Our main funding grant is from **Reigate and Banstead Borough Council** which covers the basic costs of running the District Bureaux in Redhill and Banstead. This is supplemented by funding from **Access to Justice** for our Court Work to prevent

homelessness; **Raven Housing Trust** to support their residents with debt issues, particularly Debt Relief Orders; **Community Foundation of Surrey** who arranged collective funds including from **Gatwick Foundation Fund** to provide advice and support to older and disabled residents in Horley; **Surrey County Council** for the essential Local Assistance Scheme which provides emergency funding needed to keep families together; and **Healthwatch Surrey** with whom we work in partnership to raise the “good and bad” experiences of the local NHS.

2018 will be a big year.

We will see some significant changes to the current Housing Act; Universal Credit will be fully with us in October; and of course we wait to see the impact of Brexit on local communities.

By far the biggest impact on the District Bureaux will be our move from Cromwell Road Redhill on 31 March when our lease ends prior to redevelopment of the area. As yet we haven't confirmed a new 'home' which at this stage is worrying to us all, but particularly our clients. We're doing everything we can to identify new accommodation so we can continue to offer a service which has been an important part of the borough's life since 1939.

Together we've achieved a lot in 2017. Change is coming, but we have strong roots and look forward to contributing even more to the community in 2018.

My best wishes to you all

Elaine



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