



Report to Bradley Stoke Town Council – September 2022

I have the pleasure, once again, reporting to Bradley Stoke Town Council on the continuing success of the Citizens Advice service's weekly outreach sessions.

The last 12 months has seen us emerging from the shadow of Covid. We have resumed our open-door sessions in all our outreaches and this has been appreciated and popular with our clients. To date, we are the only Citizens Advice in the area to reopen our doors to the public.

We have also seen a substantial cut in our funding from South Glos Council (38%) and this has meant the shutting of our office in Staple Hill. Now, more than ever, residents of South Gloucestershire need our services.

The costs of living crisis is now starting to bite and this is evident in the types of issues that we are seeing clients for. There has been an increase in priority debts and we are finding that these issues are also more complex than before. Over the whole service, we have seen a 50% increase in applications for Debt Relief Orders and we have seen rent arrears to housing associations and private landlords become one of our top 5 debt issues (they were not in the top 10 in previous years).

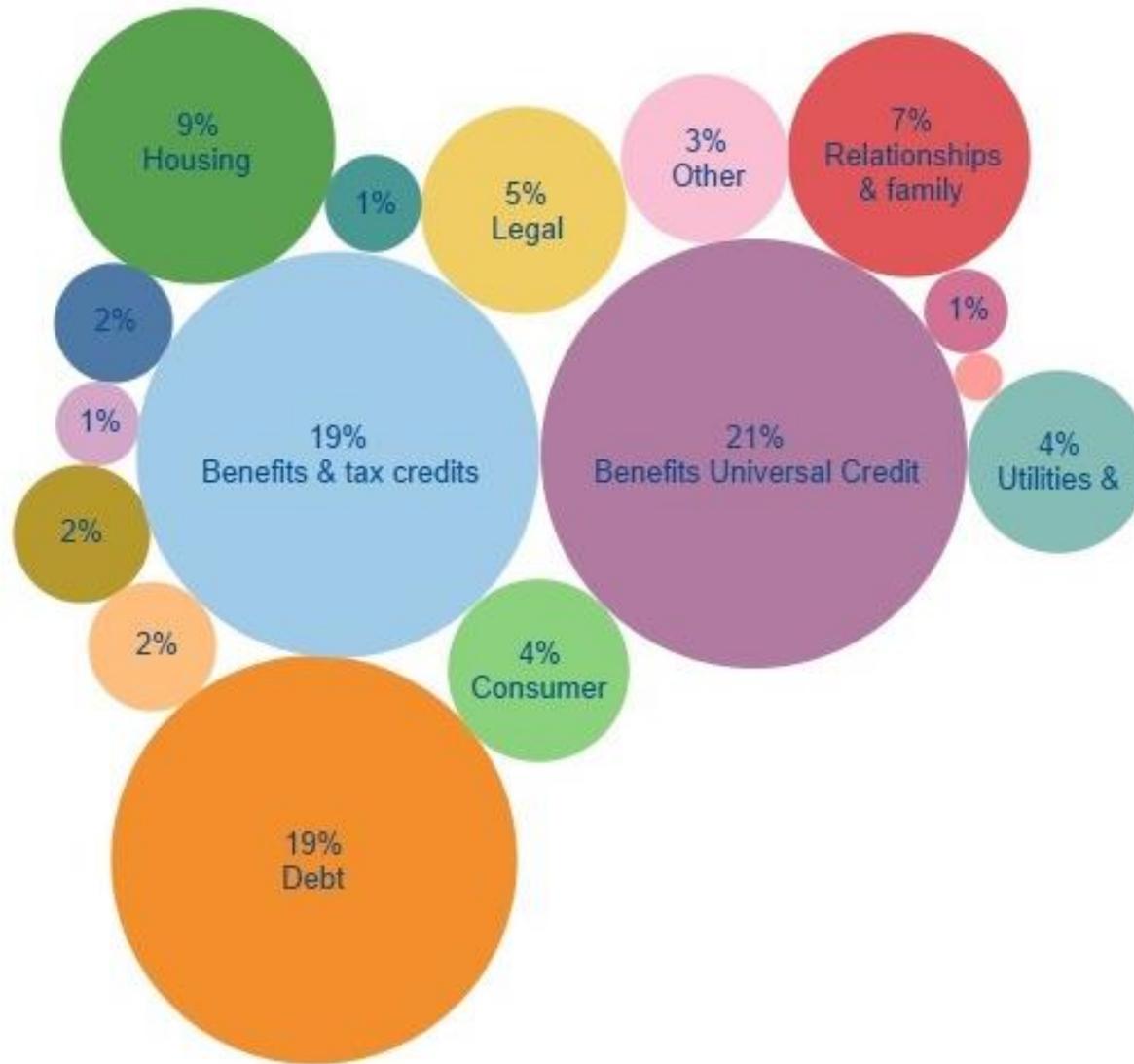
Assistance with initial claims for Universal Credit has gone up nearly 150% from 460 to 1252 in the first financial quarter of this year and we have seen an increase in benefit financial claims from £202,750 to £1,068,567 in just one quarter.

We continue to deliver our services over phone and web-chat as well as face to face.

With the future looking bleak with rising fuel costs, we thank you for your continued support to enable us to assist residents of Bradley Stoke.

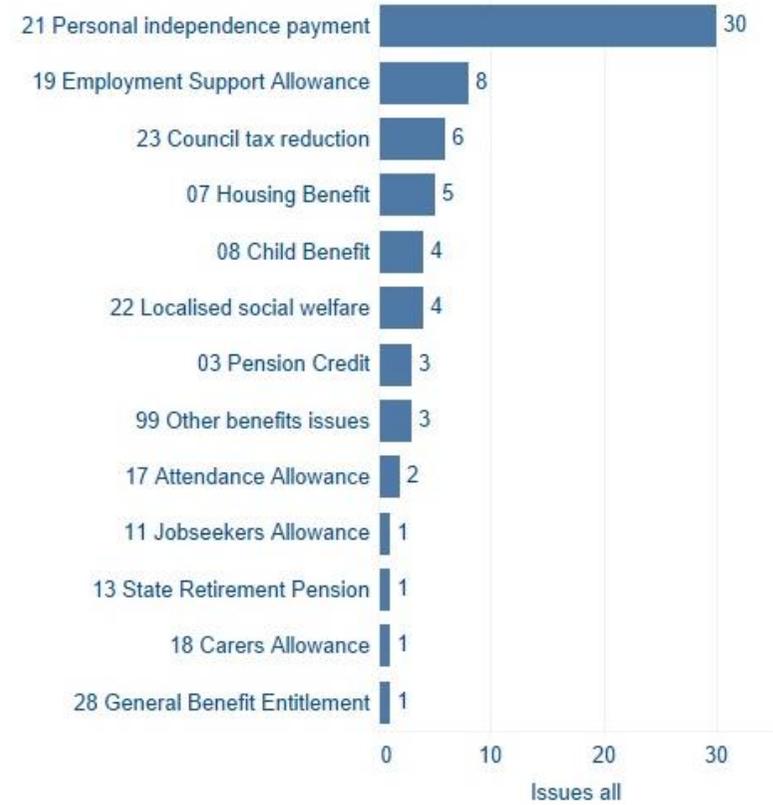
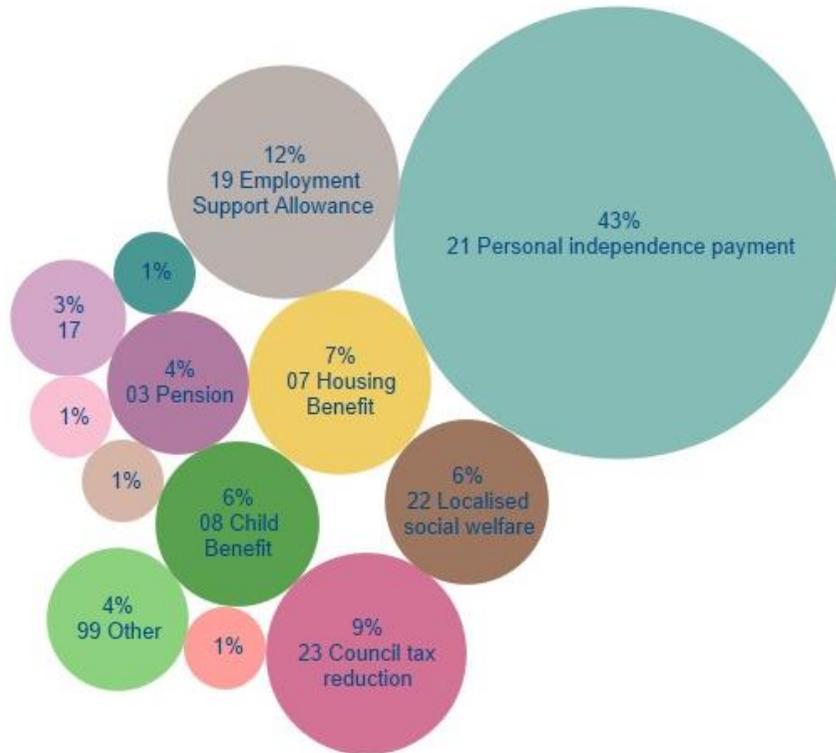
Enquiry Areas

Our main source of enquiries remains benefits with Universal Credit just topping the list ahead of general benefits and with debt remaining in third.



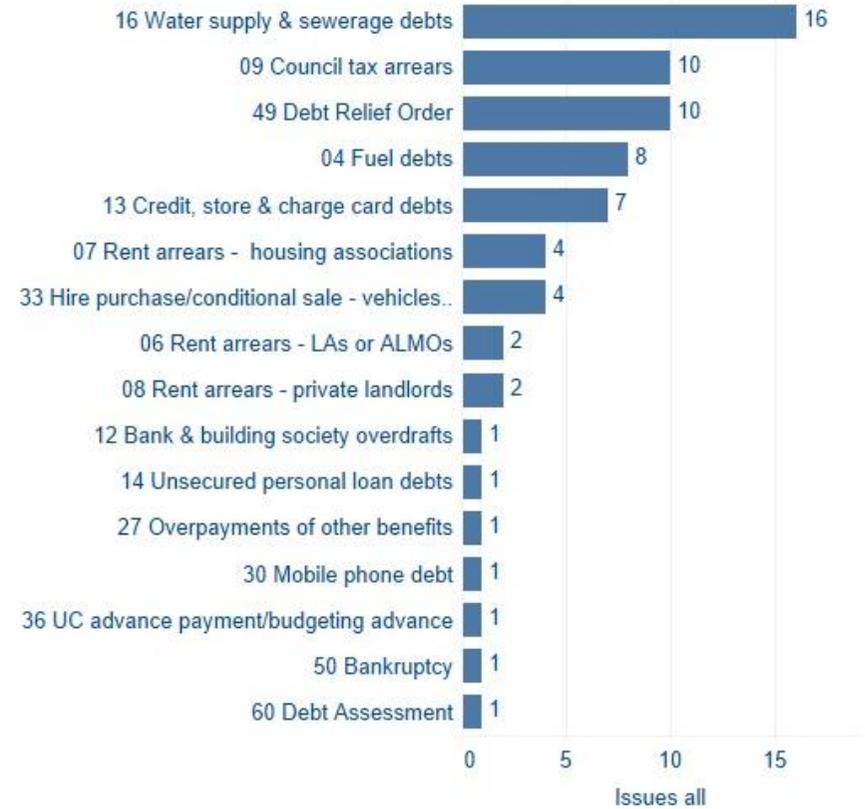
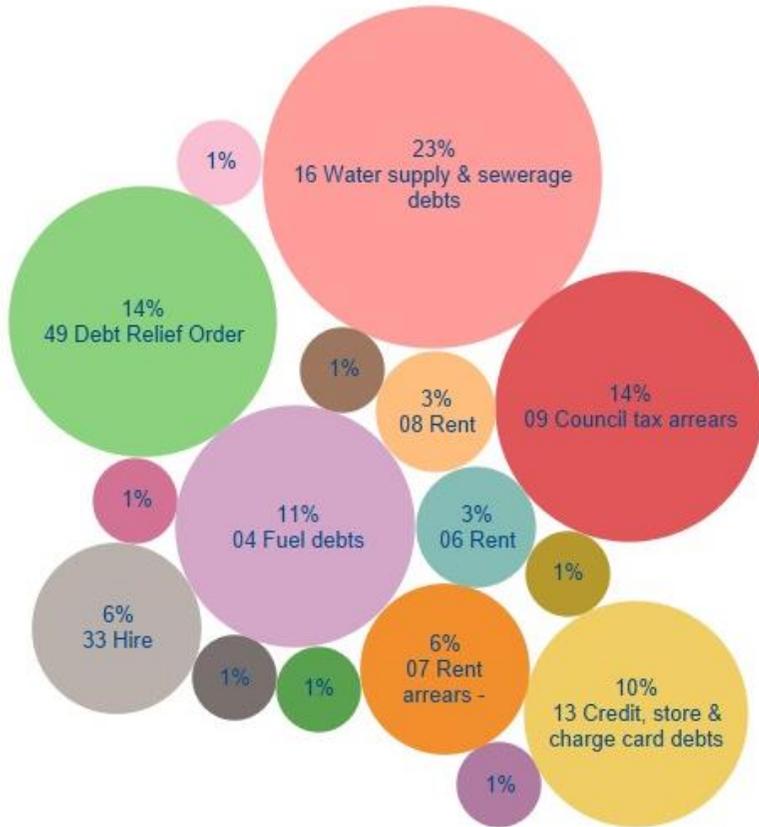
Benefits

As in previous years the highest proportion of benefit enquiries are those that relate to benefits that help the sick and disabled. Personal Independence Payment enquiries increased by 18% on last year.



Debt

Water Supply debts have increased by 10% on last year with Fuel Debts also showing an increase. There is also a noticeable rise in Council Tax areas compared to last year. However, with the cost of living crisis, we anticipate these enquiry areas will increase considerably once the weather gets colder and the current price cap is removed in October.



Age & Gender

We have seen a rise of 9% in disabled people presenting for help. The ratio of female to male has remained static over the past year. There is marked rise in people from the 45-49; 55-59 and 65+ age ranges seeking advice. As in previous years the majority of our clients are white british which aligns with our equality monitoring.

Gender



- Female
- Male

Disabled / Long term health condition



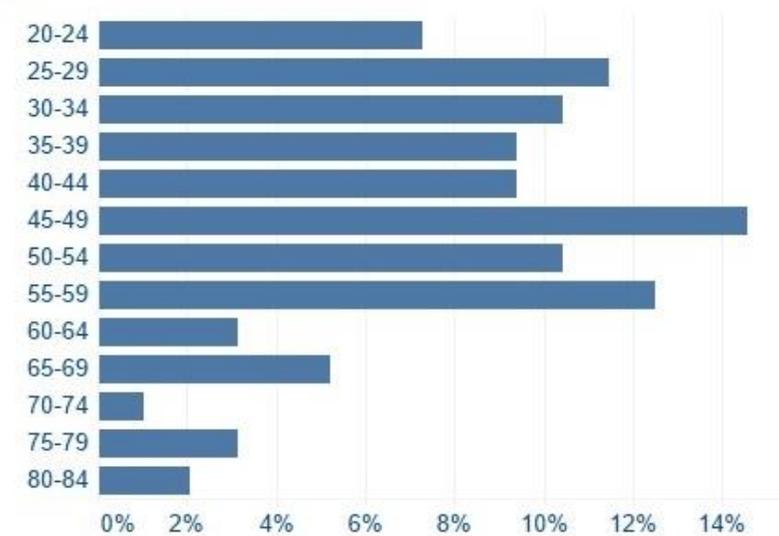
- Disabled
- Long-Term Health Condition
- Not disabled/no health problems

Type of disability (% of disabled clients)



- Hard of hearing
- Multiple Impairments
- Other Disability or Type Not Given
- Physical Impairment (non-sensory)
- Mental Health

Age



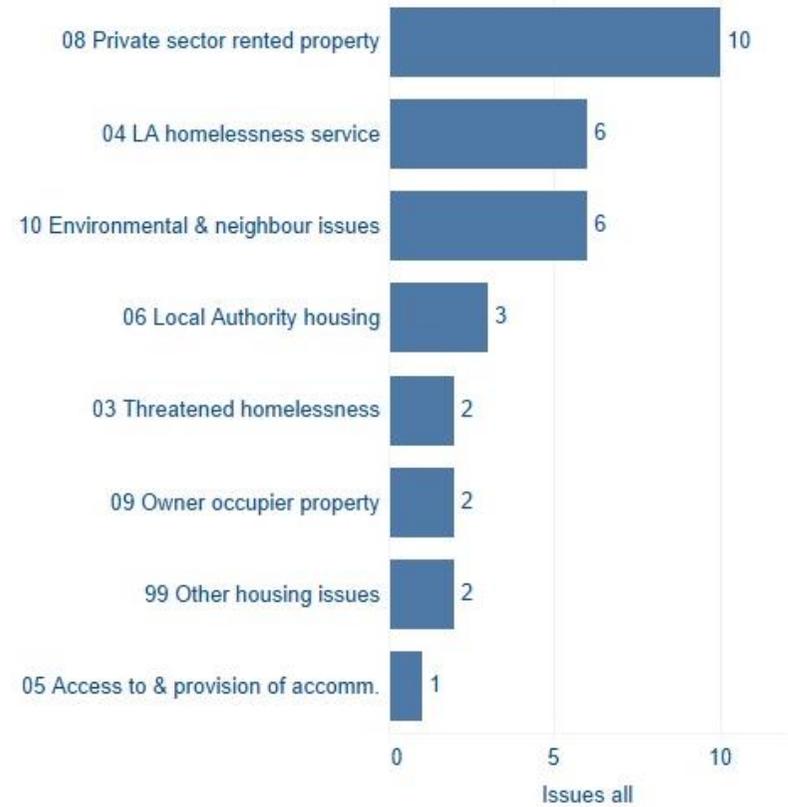
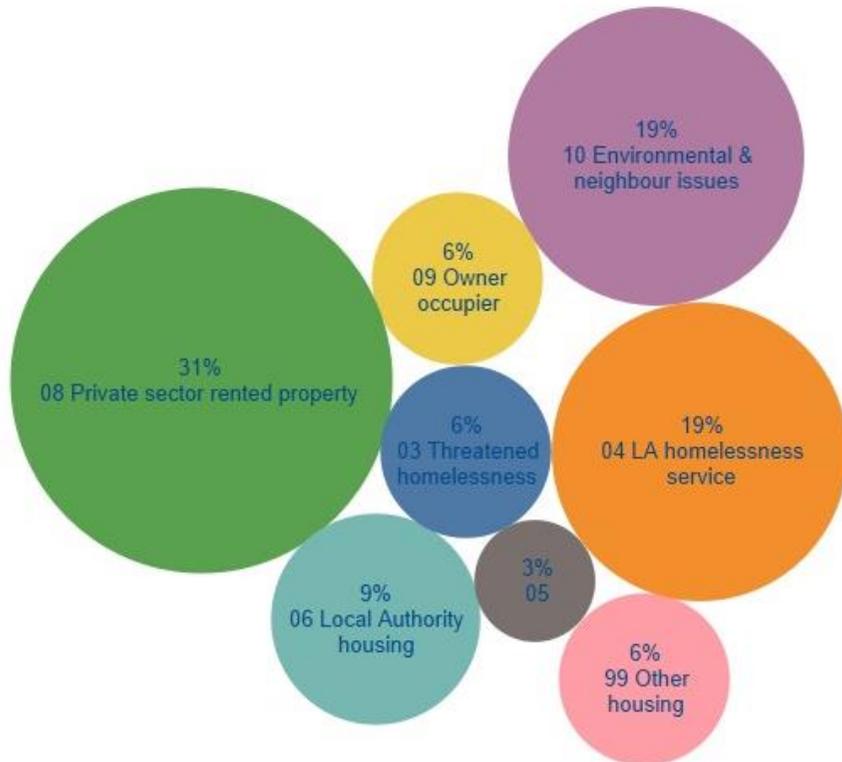
Ethnicity



- White
- Black
- Asian
- Mixed
- Other

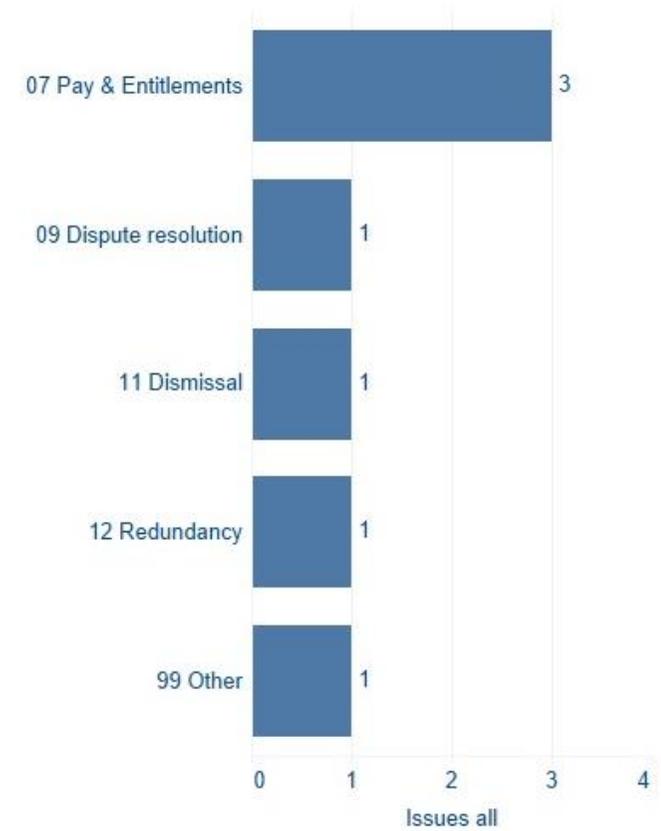
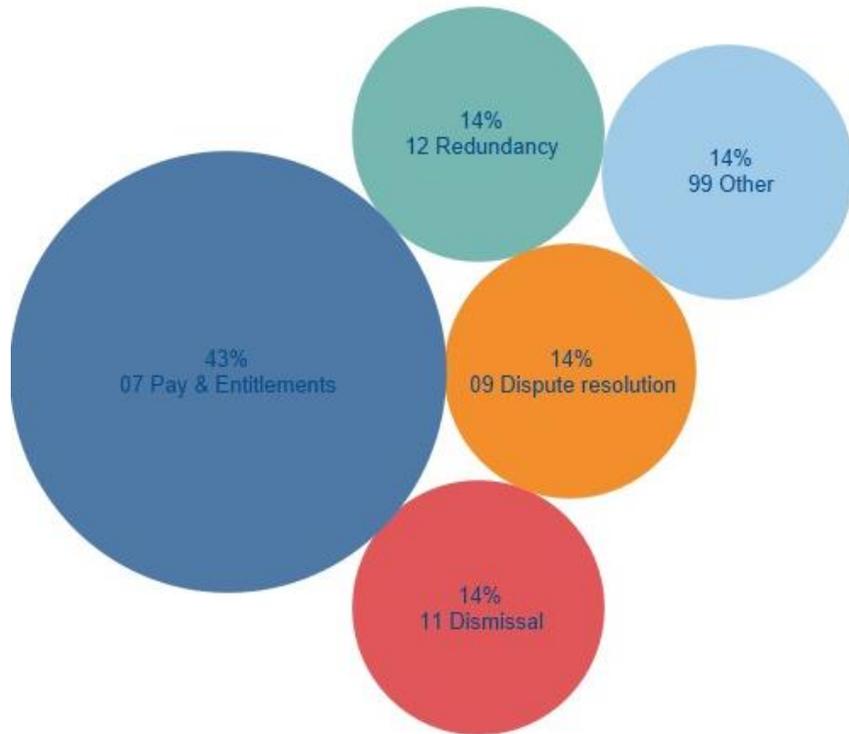
Housing

Private sector rent properties are again the highest sector of clients that we see. Homelessness enquiries have jumped dramatically due to the ban on evictions during lockdown now having been lifted. Environmental and neighbour issues have remained static.



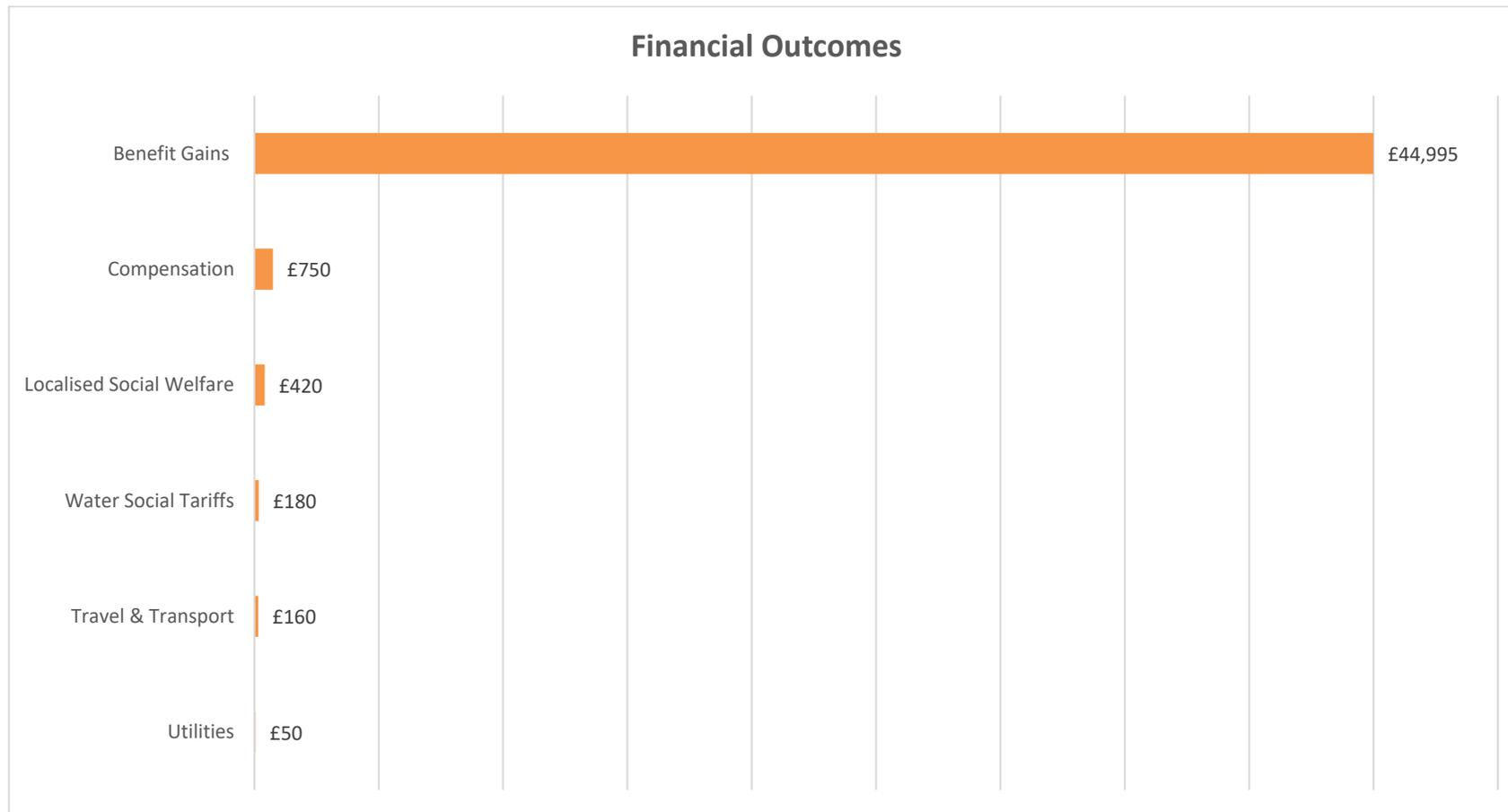
Employment

We have seen a 23% rise in enquiries around Pay & Entitlements and a rise of 6% in Dismissal enquiries. This has been one of the main areas impacted from post-Covid.



Financial Outcomes

We achieved financial outcomes for Bradley Stoke residents totalling £46,555 – an increase of 40% on last year (although bear in mind that we were not offering a face to face service last year).



Chantal Watts - Chief Executive Officer

September 2022