

After Brexit:

Helping our residents secure their rights



**citizens
advice**

Wandsworth

Contents

Introduction	1
Project timeline	1
An early response.....	2
Working in partnership.....	2
Expansion.....	4
Key achievements	4
Feedback from partners and residents	6
Next steps	7
Ongoing need for support.....	7
Learning from the project.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	7

Introduction

We're publishing this report six years after the Brexit referendum and 12 months after the deadline for EU nationals to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme². Since 2017, Wandsworth Council have funded us to deliver an advice service for EU nationals who need help securing their status in the UK. This report is intended to let our residents know that our EU Project still exists, and will do so for as long as people in the borough need it, but also to showcase what the project has achieved. In particular, it describes what can be accomplished when political will, resources, and partnerships are focussed together to address a problem, and how initiative, tenacity and kindness can make a difference to local people.

Project timeline

On 23 June 2016, the day the result of the Brexit referendum was announced, we didn't know exactly how many EU/EEA nationals, Swiss nationals or non-EEA family members of EU nationals were living in the UK or Wandsworth. We also didn't know their circumstances and, therefore, the potential scale of demand for advice about Brexit. These gaps in knowledge were due to the fact that the last Census was completed in 2011 and there was a consensus that increasing numbers of EU nationals had moved to the London in the years since.

Region	Number	Percentage
England and Wales	1,940,480	3.46%
London	78,7047	9.63%
Wandsworth	33,612	10.95%

Number of residents holding EU passports according to the 2011 Census¹

¹ ONS. (28 June 2022). *Passports held, table KS205EW*. www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks205ew

² 30 June 2021

We did know that immediately after the referendum EU nationals living in the UK began to turn to Citizens Advice to find out how they would be affected. The day after the vote our national body updated their website and within a week 65,000 people had visited the site looking for information about the implications of Brexit. In Wandsworth, enquiries to our services about nationality and citizenship doubled in the weeks after the referendum.

An early response

Wandsworth has a large population of EU nationals and after the referendum the leadership of its council had a strong desire to provide certainty to as many of these residents as possible. As a leading advice agency in the borough we saw a need to be responsive to this emerging issue and engaged with Wandsworth Council about how we could work together to support our residents. This led to the establishment of our EU Project in November 2017, which was one of the first, if not the first, dedicated advice service for EU nationals established in the UK after Brexit.

From early on the project had a focus on community engagement and outreach. Before the details of the EU Settlement Scheme were announced we ran events and information sessions to publicise the key messages that the rights of EU nationals hadn't changed yet but that they needed to 'get ready for Brexit' by making sure they had evidence about their time here. We also advised residents about existing options for securing their status, which included getting documents to prove they had permanent residence or indefinite leave to remain, as well as applying for British citizenship.

As details about the design EU Settlement Scheme emerged our engagement with residents showed that, for many EU nationals, the idea of needing to regularise their immigration status was incomprehensible³. This was because they were used to travelling freely within the UK without any question of their right to live, work or study here. We realised that many residents, such as older people with permanent residence, people with dual nationality and young people, assumed that any new rules wouldn't apply to them⁴. This learning shaped the work of the project going forward and helped us make the case for continuing and expanding funding.

Working in partnership

Community outreach naturally led to the project developing strong partnerships with local organisations and with similar services that were subsequently set up in other London boroughs. It benefited from being highly visible and a combined effort involving the voluntary sector as well as local and central government. Partners from across the borough have

³ All EU nationals living in the UK by 31 December 2020 had to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme even if they were married to a British national, had children who grew up in the UK, had permanent residence, had been living in the UK for a very short or long time or were born in the UK (unless they had British citizenship).

⁴ This was a particular issue for older people with permanent residence, who hadn't needed to think about their immigration status for years. Alongside older people with indefinite leave to remain, whose paperwork often didn't use modern language to describe their status, we saw the possibility for future issues analogous to the Windrush scandal.

collaborated to ensure that the most important messages have gotten out to EU nationals, namely that they need to take action to secure their rights and that advice and support is available. The table below shows the range of organisations that the project has worked with.

Voluntary, faith and community sector	Central and local government	Other civil groups and organisations
Ace of Clubs	Future First ⁵	Battersea Academy
Contact	HMP Wandsworth	Wandsworth Chamber of Commerce
Elays Network	Home Office	Employers
Here for Good	Jobcentre Plus	Eritrean Muslim Community Association
Katherine Low Settlement	Local schools	ESOL providers
Little Village	NHS	European Movement
Place2Be	St. George's Hospital	Roehampton Response Network
South West London Law Centres	Wandsworth Adult Social Care	Roehampton University
SPEAR	Wandsworth Children's Services	Seraphus Solicitors
The Romanian and Eastern European Hub	Wandsworth Housing Department	South Thames College
Wandsworth Foodbank	Wandsworth Library Service	Wandsworth Voluntary Sector Forum
WCEN	Wandsworth Registry Office	White Eagle Club
Youth Legal	Wandsworth Work Match	Wandsworth Older People's Forum

One of our key partners has been SPEAR, a charity that supports people experiencing homelessness in South-West London. SPEAR's service users are more likely to be vulnerable people who have rarely interacted with council or voluntary sector. They're at particular risk of not securing their status not only because they may not be aware of the need to act but also because they have less formal evidence about their time living in the UK.

"The staff from the EU Project were amazing – they were willing to work flexibly to support our clients. Our clients have a background of homelessness, and can be chaotic and difficult to engage at times. Their communication was clear and concise, to both our clients and our staff, and the team were always on hand to clarify any information as necessary. They also went above and beyond their role with some clients, who would ask them advice on other matters. It has been, and still is, an absolute pleasure to work with EU Advice Project."

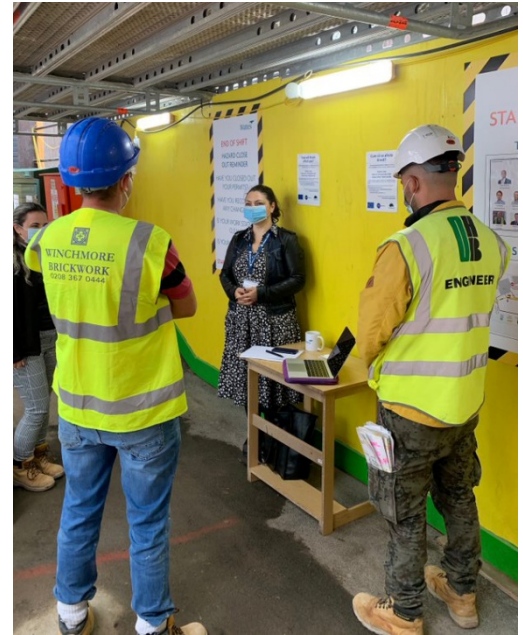
SPEAR manager

⁵ Formerly Wandsworth Independent Living Scheme, a council team who support young people leaving care.

Expansion

As the deadline to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme approached in 2020 the project faced growing demand. This was seen across the country, our national body reported that their online immigration advice pages were viewed 1.9 million times in 2019/20 and that major events such as the 2019 general election and the UK leaving the EU on 30 January caused big spikes in people seeking Brexit-related information⁶.

We therefore sought additional funding so we could expand the project and meet demand. We obtained funding from the Home Office to the support a partnership with South West London Law Centre (SWLLC) and the project team grew to include an immigration specialist based at SWLLC, three caseworkers based in our services and a fourth caseworker seconded to Wandsworth Council as a community navigator. Having a member of staff seconded to the council helped the project expand its reach across the borough by allowing access to schools, social care services and local housing and welfare benefits teams.



Information session for Wates Group employees

When the EU Settlement Scheme deadline passed in June 2021 the consensus amongst our team, funders and other stakeholders was that many eligible applicants had missed the chance to apply. Our project funding was therefore extended to July 2022 and is currently funded until September 2022, with our caseworkers continuing to help vulnerable residents submit late applications and work on ongoing cases that involve complex issues.

Key achievements

- By the end of March 2022 70,850 Wandsworth residents had submitted an application to the EU Settlement Scheme⁷, **nearly 200% of the estimated population of EU nationals based on the Census data available in 2016.**
- The GLA Roma Support Forum has recognised Wandsworth for its **high level of success in engaging with Gypsy Roma Travellers of European nationality** and helping them apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.
- Wandsworth has been recognised for its **high level of success in engaging with EU nationals who are sleeping rough.** To date, all of these residents who have been

⁶ Citizens Advice. (28 June 2022). *Impact report 2019/20.*

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact%20report%202020%20Final.pdf

⁷GOV.UK. (28 June 2022). *EU Settlement Scheme statistics, May 2022 release.* www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics-may-2022

identified by our services and partners have received advice and support to secure their immigration status.

- **54%** of all concluded applications from Wandsworth residents have resulted in Settled Status being awarded and **41%** resulted in an award of Pre-Settled Status, a success rate higher than the national average⁸.
- **20%** of all project clients were homeless or living in a hostel. Most rough sleepers we assisted had no evidence of their UK residence before contacting us.
- **27%** of project clients had a disability or a long-term health issue.
- **146** outreach sessions delivered, attended by 1,476 individual residents and 846 professionals. Outreach activities included drop-in sessions at local churches, awareness raising sessions in schools and on construction sites, working with the Wandsworth Older People's Forum, the Roehampton Response Network, schools, the local CCG and many more.
- **66** employers engaged. We informed employers of the rights given by the new type of immigration status and how right to work checks need to be performed. This helped Wandsworth employers understand how to avoid discriminating against new and existing employees from the EU.
- We worked with Children's Services to **proactively identify looked-after children and care leavers who needed to apply for Settled Status** and provided intensive support to this group.
- **130 +** prisoners in HMP Wandsworth helped to apply as a result of a collaboration with a prisoners befriending charity and with the support of a specialist immigration advice charity. There remains a need to set-up a more coordinated advice service to help the 700 foreign nationals on remand in HMP Wandsworth.
- **784** individual households supported with advice and information.
- **2,825** separate issues advised on. Mostly immigration and nationality, but also benefits, housing and employment.



Maciej Psyk from European Movement helps promote a session for Polish nationals

⁸ GOV.UK. (28 June 2022). *EU Settlement Scheme statistics, May 2022 release*.
www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics-may-2022

- **150,000** Wandsworth households received our printed information.
- **£315,342** income gained achieved through securing access to benefits and employment.
- **11,874** page views of our online resources about the EU Settlement Scheme.

“Thank you for providing this very informative website. It is one of the best resources of information on the EU Settlement Scheme that I have come across”
Wandsworth resident

Feedback from partners and residents

“Since the CAB has been on board with our project, we have had various people come to help our guests with a variety of problems. Mainly with the EUSS. They have successfully achieved settled status or pre-settled status for many of our guests - if unable to do so they have processed an application and advised us that they have forwarded it to a lawyer going forward. They have been an effective lead in various areas at all times. Each person has kept us informed of all the progress via email or visits to our Church or by telephone. They have always treated our guests with the great respect they deserve in the current circumstances they find themselves in. They have always been polite and informative and have been of significant benefit to both us and our guests, giving us comprehensive feedback with their progress. They uphold the highest standards of professionalism and confidentiality at all times. We would not hesitate to highly recommend this service to anyone that needs advice in any area.”

Sarah, Southcroft Church

My experience with [Citizen Advice Wandsworth] sums up what a unique invaluable service it is that is offering free, confidential and impartial advice helping individuals and the local community - it's priceless!”

Wandsworth resident

“[We] were delighted to be able to work with the EU Advice Project at Citizens Advice Wandsworth. Through our collaboration we were able to help many businesses understand key issues surrounding their employees’ rights to secure their rights in the UK following Brexit. The presentation at our Forums and written communications were very professional as well as being informative and helpful.”

Beverley Corson, Wandsworth Chamber of Commerce

“I was amongst the first to apply and had splendid support for which I am very grateful; because of my age I could not have done without.”

Wandsworth resident

“We are extremely grateful for the help given by the Citizens Advice Wandsworth EU Advice team. After being street homeless for many months, the adviser helped us apply to the EUSS, open bank accounts, apply for benefits, and look for jobs. We have never been treated with

such dignity and compassion before. Our lives are now safer because of the EU Advice service and we cannot thank them enough for all their help.”

Wandsworth resident

“I contacted Citizen Advice Wandsworth and I was swiftly and efficiently helped and advised by Cecilia and Adina. They kept in touch with me throughout the process to check the progress. I am very happy to report that my application was successful!”

Wandsworth resident

Next steps

Ongoing need for support

12 months after the EU Settlement Scheme deadline our project team are still identifying EU nationals who are eligible for Settled or Pre-Settled Status. Many of these people need support and advice to make a successful application, with vulnerable groups such as children, homeless people and older people most likely to fall through the cracks.

Nearly 45% of all EU Settlement Scheme applicants in Wandsworth have been granted Pre-Settled Status, which expires 5 years after it was issued. This means that around 33,000 residents may still need advice about upgrading to Settled Status in the next five years.

All status holders are required to keep their details up to date and provide proof of their status when applying for jobs or benefits, or when using healthcare and rent a property. As the status is fully digital, we will continue to provide free post-application support to ensure that those who lack the necessary skills or who are digitally excluded do not experience barriers to demonstrating their rights in the UK.

Learning from the project

Across Wandsworth we worked together on this project, galvanised by the urgency of the issues faced by our residents and the potential detriment to people not taking action to secure their rights.

Its model of collaboration with a wide range of organisations, including employer, community groups and faith groups, along with the success of its approach to partnership, should be retained and built on. We meet the needs of residents best when we work together.

Acknowledgements

This project wouldn't have succeeded without the staff who have contributed energy, care and expertise over the years: Lucia Palma, Adina Maglan, Cecilia Potez, Charles Bourthoumieux, Abinayan Balachandran, Philippa Burns, Caroline Dunne and Will Hadwen.

We'd also like to thank the many local partners who have worked with us closely on this project since its outset.

Free, confidential advice. Whoever you are.

Our aims

We aim to provide the information and advice people need for the problems they face, and to improve the policies and practices that affect them.

How we work

Our services are for everyone. We give people tools to enable them to resolve their issues and we provide in-depth, expert support for those who need it. We work with partners to build advice knowledge in communities and address issues that affect our clients.



cawandsworth.org

Published June 2022

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Citizens Advice Wandsworth is an operating name of Wandsworth Citizens Advice Bureaux Limited. Registered charity number 1040303.